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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



November 2010  
*Art and Spirituality*

Vol. 115, No. 11

# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *ART AND MUSIC*



### ON ART

**I**N art, interest must be centred on the principal theme. Drama is the most difficult of all arts. In it two things are to be satisfied—first, the ears, and second, the eyes. To paint a scene, if one thing be painted, it is easy enough; but to paint different things and yet to keep up the central interest is very difficult. Another difficult thing is stage-management, that is, combining different things in such a manner as to keep the central interest intact.

The secret of Greek Art is its imitation of nature even to the minutest details; whereas the secret of Indian Art is to represent the ideal. The energy of the Greek painter is spent in perhaps painting a piece of flesh, and he is so successful that a dog is deluded into taking it to be a real bit of meat and so goes to bite it. Now, what glory is there in merely imitating nature? Why not place an actual bit of flesh before the dog?

The Indian tendency, on the other hand, to represent the ideal, the supersensual, has become degraded into painting grotesque images. Now, true Art can be compared to a lily which springs from the ground, takes its nourishment from the ground, is in touch with the ground, and yet is quite high above it. So Art must be in touch with nature—and wherever that touch is gone, Art degenerates—yet it must be above nature.

In glancing at a highly finished painting we cannot understand where its beauty lies. Moreover, unless the eye is, to a certain extent, trained, one cannot appreciate the subtle touches and blendings, the inner genius of a work of art.

### ON MUSIC

Music is the highest art and, to those who understand, is the highest worship.

There is science in Dhrupad, Kheyal, etc., but it is in Kirtana, i.e. in Mathura and Viraha and other like compositions that there is real music—for there is feeling. Feeling is the soul, the secret of everything. There is more music in common people's songs, and they should be collected together. The science of Dhrupad etc., applied to the music of Kirtana will produce the perfect music.

Unless each note is given full play in every scale, all the science of music is marred. In painting, by keeping in touch with nature, you can make it as artistic as you like; there is no harm in doing that, and the result will be nothing but good. Similarly, in music, you can display any amount of skill by keeping to science, and it will be pleasing to the ear.

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,  
7.407, 5.125, 5.258, 5.361



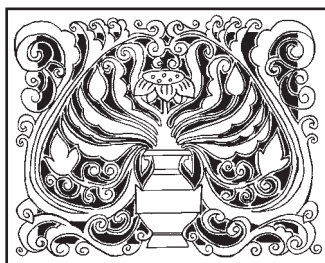
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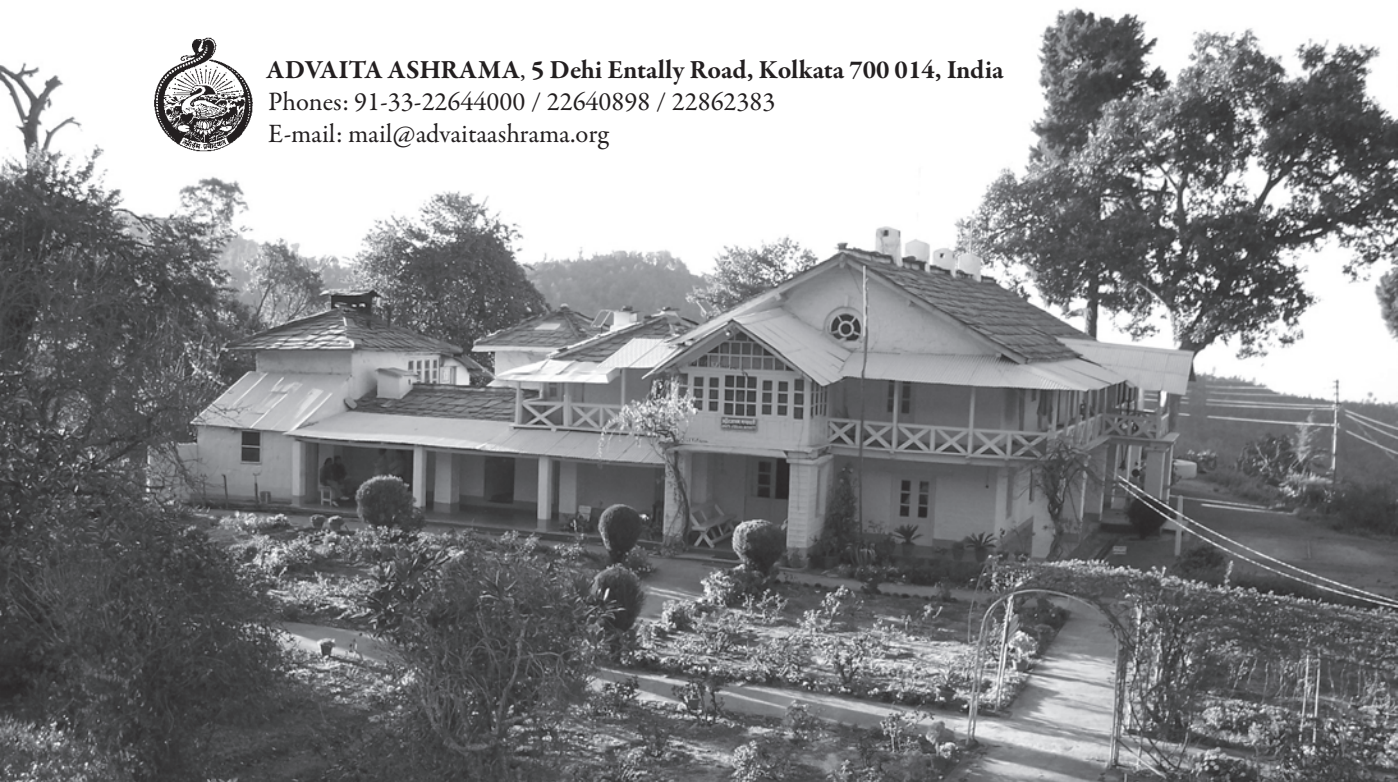
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## The Poetic Vision

November 2010

Vol. 115, No. 11

ब्रह्मा कृणोति वरुणो गातुविदं तमीमहे ।  
व्यूर्णोति हृदा मतिं नव्यो जायतामृतं वित्तं मे अस्य रोदसी ॥

Varuna performs works of preservation; we solicit him as our guide who removes the obstacles on our way. Our invocator sings for him this thoughtful praise with (all his) heart; may he be true to us. May heaven and earth be aware of this praise of ours. (Rig Veda, 1.105.15)

जन्माद्यस्य यतोऽन्वयादितरतश्चार्थेष्वभिज्ञः स्वराट्  
तेने ब्रह्म हृदा य आदिकवये मुह्यन्ति यत्सूरयः ।  
तेजोवारिमृदां यथा विनिमयो यत्र त्रिसर्गोऽमृषा  
धाम्ना स्वेन सदा निरस्तकुहकं सत्यं परं धीमहि ॥

He from whom the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe take place; who is both the material and the instrumental cause of it; who is omniscient; who is the only one having self-mastery, being the one independent entity; who illumined the mind of Brahma with the Vedic revelation, whose wisdom is the wonder of even the greatest of sages; in whom the worlds, the manifestation of the three *gunas*, subsist in reality without in the least affecting him, just as the combination of material elements like fire, water, and earth subsist in their causes without changing their elemental nature; in whose light of consciousness there is no place for anything false—on that supreme Truth we meditate. (Bhagavata, 1.1.1)

अहङ्कारः प्रभुः सभ्या विषया नर्तकी मतिः ।  
तालादिधारिण्यक्षाणि दीपः साक्ष्यवभासकः ॥

The ego is the patron, the sense objects the audience, the intellect the dancer, the sense organs musicians playing on their instruments; and the lamp illumining them all is the witness-consciousness. (*Panchadashi*, 10.14)

स्वस्थानसंस्थितो दीपः सर्वतो भासयेद्यथा ।  
स्थिरस्थायी तथा साक्षी बहिरन्तः प्रकाशयेत् ॥

As a lamp reveals all objects while remaining in its own place, so does the witness-consciousness, itself ever motionless, illumine the objects within and without (including the workings of the mind). (10.15)

# THIS MONTH

Art and spirituality, apparently two distinct domains, have an integral connection. Reviving this connection through **The Divine Artist** will release the huge potential in all art forms, giving rise to a new type of culture that Sri Ramakrishna had come to usher in.



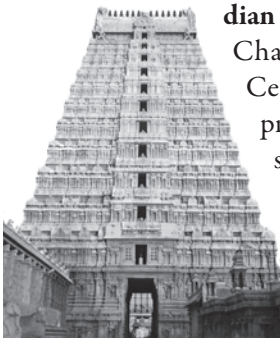
Music has a great hold on the human psyche and every culture employs it widely. Swami Sattwasthananda, a monastic member of Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar,

traces the synthesis of matter and spirit, the human and the Divine, in **Music: A Direct Means to the Highest**.

Dance is disciplined movement and it connects the individual to the universal. It portrays 'through *abhinaya*, expression, not only devotion but the deity himself'. Shruba Mukhopadhyay, a senior journalist from New Delhi, simplifies the steps towards understanding dance in **Indian Classical Dance and Spirituality**.



In **Entrances and Gateways to the Indian Pilgrimage** Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, Chairperson, India International Centre—Asia Project, New Delhi, provides an elegant analysis of the symbology of temple gateways and how a pilgrimage is a spiritual journey from the external world to the inner sanctum sanctorum.



Sri Amal Ghosh, former Professor, Central St Martin's College, University of the Arts, London, reflects on the definition of **The Spiritual in Art**, and traces its history among artists who strove to introduce the spiritual dimension in art.

Most concepts on which we base our thought and action are metaphorical in nature. In **Transcending the Metaphor** Swami Madhurananda, a monastic member of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, writes on what metaphor is and how Sri Ramakrishna, by teaching through metaphors, helps transcend them and experience Reality.



Mysticism is 'beyond all feelings, emotions, ecstasies', and even bliss. Swami Prabhavananda, founder Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, throws light on **Mysticism and Mystic Visions**, clearing the haze of mystery surrounding it.

In the ninth instalment of **Vedanta-sara** Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, comments on the nature of the individual self and the different levels of personality.

In the third instalment of **Mahendranath Gupta: Last Days with Sri Ramakrishna** Swami Chetanananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, chronicles Sri Ramakrishna's lila at Kashipur during the last days of 1885 and early 1886.



## EDITORIAL

# The Divine Artist

I WANT TO KNOW what were the steps by which men passed from barbarism to civilization,' said Voltaire. We can step in and answer in two words: art and spirituality. In India these two words—rather fields—were never disparate. Nowadays a distinction is made between spirituality, religion, and art. However, in many ancient cultures everything was done religiously: being born, eating, sleeping, and finally even dying. Religion is a step towards spirituality, for no irreligious person can be spiritual. If religion permeated every facet of life, art too had this inseparable connection. All great religious movements—Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—gave rise to art, and art in turn helped spread these movements.

The development of art is an index of a society's progress, its identifying characteristics, and uniqueness. This distinctness of every culture and community finds expression in such genres as folk tales, mythology, and philosophy, which in turn inspire art. Defining art is, however, difficult. The fine arts—painting, music, dance, and sculpture—can be viewed as a classificatory schema of art. These divisions have further ramified into hundreds of branches, and each subdivision has developed its philosophy; therefore, a specific definition of art becomes difficult. Fine art is different from industrial art, stylistic forms, and decorative designs; and what an artisan or a skilled worker produces belongs to applied art.

The fine arts produce an experience—of beauty, goodness, value, excellence; they have emotional intensity and raise the mind from the mundane, at least for the time being. Truly speaking, art is not located somewhere outside the artist or the connoisseur. If an object of art could speak, it would say

something like: 'I am not a mere elephant carved in stone, I am an idea.' It is the 'idea' that is expressed through various media.

Music, painting, dance, literature, sculpture, are actually forms of communication having a language of their own. Whoever understands this language is able to experience the feelings and moods of the poet, the artist, or the sculptor. In India, since ancient times, aesthetics was termed *rasa*—literally, flavour or essence—and was based on the doctrine of *bhavas*, moods. The various *bhavas* have been used to refer to artistic sentiments and also to the modes of response. Indian art did not overly burden itself with questions of style, of schools or genre, or of historical and social influences.

Is all art spiritual? We find works of art being defaced, destroyed, derided, and demeaned; artists being criticized, hooted at, abused, and even beaten up. It is not easy for artists to gain recognition. Some are lucky to get it only after they have passed away. An artist should have the freedom of expression, but sometimes the expression may be frivolous—an aberration or an idiosyncrasy not commonly shared—this cannot be passed as art. Art—even abstract art—cannot be totally divorced from Reality; it ought to have a universal dimension and a timeless quality to it. Above all, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, 'Art must be in touch with nature—and wherever that touch is gone, Art degenerates—yet it must be above nature.'

Once a person came to Sant Kabir saying, 'Where is the bluest sky, where the deepest ocean; in which forest would I find the fairest flower, where can I hear the best raga.' Kabir was surprised and replied, '*Pani bich min piyasi, mohin sun sun awat hansi*; the fish is thirsty in the waters, I feel like laughing on hearing so.' What Kabir meant

was this: we are surrounded with the aesthetic, and yet are searching and dying for it. Standing in front of the Taj Mahal on a full moon night can move even a dull heart, but a busy bazaar does not generally evoke any artistic sentiment. The first experience can be enhanced a thousandfold if the eye is trained. Swamiji clarifies: 'In glancing at a highly finished painting we cannot understand where its beauty lies. Moreover, unless the eye is, to a certain extent, trained, one cannot appreciate the subtle touches and blendings, the inner genius of a work of art.' The same holds good for music, sculpture, or dance. Thus appreciation of art needs a degree of training. The more trained the eye, the better the aesthetic experience. The work of art, the artist, and the observer must coalesce for a while.

A trained eye means a trained mind. This comes through refinement of the senses and the intellect. There are many ways to gain this refinement: from attending an art appreciation course to contemplating on God. To a refined mind that has become perfect through sadhana, the whole universe becomes a work of art. That mind also understands that a work of art is a small portion of the vast Nature expressed creatively by one or more persons. This individual creativity is very important for it proves the inexhaustible capacity of the human mind.

One who can perceive art even beyond forms, lines, tunes, or verses, comes in touch with the Divine Artist. Swamiji declares: 'I never read of any more beautiful conception of God than the following: "He is the Great Poet, the Ancient Poet; the whole universe is His poem, coming in verses and rhymes and rhythms, written in infinite bliss."' That is why God is called *kavi*, poet, and, as the Upanishad says, '*Raso vai sah*; the Self-created is verily joy.' Moreover, the rishis who realized this Poet were also called *kavis* and the scriptures—vedic, epic, and mythological—they gave are poetic and musical. These scriptures in turn have inspired art for thousands of generations, and are still doing so.

'It is my opinion,' Swamiji says, 'that Sri Rama-

krishna was born to vivify all the branches of art and culture in this country.' Sri Ramakrishna was not only good at painting, vocal music, sculpture, and dance, there was something extraordinary about him: he was a natural artist in touch with a higher Reality. Ordinarily, art unveils nature. Yet, such art can also be thoroughly materialistic and a source of hedonistic pleasure. But sublime art has a different dimension. Sublime artists empty their hearts of all worldly slime to visualize within an intelligible image or idea; then they identify with it and proceed to work in stone, paint, metal, words, or sound. The ideal then is that of a *Reality beyond Nature*. Sublime art has always tried to capture the transcendent Reality in its manifestations.

To experience the Divine Artist is the zenith of art, and we find that experience in Sri Ramakrishna, the sublime Artist. The revival of all branches of art and culture, for which he is the harbinger, must have this spiritual dimension. Those who are part of this revival may not produce tangible works of art, but their very lives are artistic, beautiful, valuable, universal, and timeless. Their words, thoughts, feelings, and karmas assume a transcendent dimension. Their senses, body, mind, and intelligence—indeed their whole personality—become a work of art.

Such artists can stand in the busy bazaar or in front of the Taj Mahal and not make any distinction between the two. In pain and misery, in happiness and joy, in poverty and wealth, in learning and ignorance, in sickness and health, they catch the Real. We read how as a boy Sri Ramakrishna saw a flock of milk-white cranes flying across a jet-black rain cloud and went into samadhi. But sometimes he also experienced samadhi while looking at drunkards and prostitutes, for he saw the Divine in them. For him the Divine Artist, Nature, and human beings fused into one. Sri Ramakrishna's art has given us a fresh perspective on fine art.

Therefore, after its long travails from barbarism, humanity cannot tarry merely at being civilized, it has to proceed further. Deep down there is a growing universal need for direction, which is gracefully addressed by the Divine Artist.



# Music: A Direct Means to the Highest

Swami Sattwasthananda



ALL THE SPIRITUAL PERSONALITIES that India has produced unanimously agree that the goal of human life is Self-realization. Sri Ramakrishna also holds God-realization to be the goal of human life. Swami Vivekananda put the same idea in a different language when he said that each soul is potentially divine and the goal of human life is to manifest this inner divinity. Indian culture posits this ideal as the highest through its art, literature, music, customs, and mythology. It emphasizes that all our endeavours to attain wealth and enjoyment, artha and kama, should not be independent self-sufficient goals. Rather, they ought to be closely related to and governed by moral principles, dharma. This is to be done to prepare oneself for attaining liberation, moksha, or manifesting the divinity already in us.<sup>1</sup>

Music is a fine art which excels in many respects the arts of architecture, sculpture, and painting. It appeals to and attracts all living beings. Music is a collection of sweet and soothing sounds vibrating and creating an aesthetic feeling that overpowers the feelings for the other beauties of nature. That is why it is recognized as the greatest and finest art that brings peace and solace to all humans.<sup>2</sup> Indian

music has a character of its own. It is a synthesis of countless forms bonded through spiritual fervour. It encompasses spirit and matter, the human and divine realms. It paves a path that connects human beings with God. It gives a subjective knowledge of the Supreme. Swami Prajnanananda observes:

Music in India is a superb creative art, infused with a religious feeling. Music is a spiritual *sādhana* that uplifts the consciousness of man to the highest. It is not just a subtle fabric of tones and tunes, of fancy and dream, but is a dynamic spiritual expression. The ancient seers saw in their ecstatic vision the divine forms of the *rāgas*, realized them, and transmitted them to humanity. They realized the *rāgas* as both objective and subjective—material and spiritual ones, and not merely as the inert structures of tones and tunes. So a *rāga* is a psycho-material object that spiritualizes both the body and the mind, and helps men to transcend both matter and mind so as to get the luminous apperception of the Absolute.<sup>3</sup>

Music is part and parcel of our daily lives. Though we may live amidst music, most of us might not have understood its true significance. Since a clearer and deeper understanding of music will help us progress towards the goal of life, a modest

attempt has been made here to show how this great art can take us to the highest.

### Origin of Music

Indians believe, from time immemorial, that music, the language of emotions, has a divine origin. The infinite Brahman manifests itself as this universe. This concept has been elegantly expressed in Indian music and literature.<sup>4</sup> Swami Prajnanananda elaborates on the process of creation of sound and music:

In ancient Greece, the musicians, and the musicologists, and also the philosophers used to believe that music exists eternally in the ethereal space in the form of vibrations of the cosmic energy. The ancient musicians and the musicologists of India similarly believed that real music exists in the depths of the subconscious mind, in the form of divine energy, kundalini, in an unmanifested form, and when it is manifested, it is transformed into tones and tunes, tinged with the colour of aesthetic sentiments and moods.<sup>5</sup>

Sharngadeva says:

*Caitanyam sarva-bhūtānām vivyaktam jagadātmanā;  
Nāda-brahma tadānandam-advitīyam-upāsmāhe.  
Nakāraṁ prāṇa-nāmānaṁ dakāraṁ-analāṁ viduḥ;  
Jātaḥ prāṇāgni samyogāt-tena nādābhidhīyate.*

I meditate on Brahman as *nāda* [the uncreated primal sound], the non-dual blissful Consciousness underlying all of Creation that is manifest as the universe. The letter *na* is known to represent *prāṇa*, the vital force, and *da* represents *agni*, fire [the will to create]; as it [the primal sound] is born of the conjunction of the vital force and fire, it is called *nāda*.

This verse suggests that the primal creative will is the source of the universe, a view attested by the Upanishads; and music is a product of this primal will:

Everything has been evolved first in the causal unmanifested form, and then in the manifested form. The form remains the same, but its degrees of manifestation differ, and this difference brings the idea of *change*, i.e. creation or projection. The musical treatises of India admit this theory of evolution. They say that music evolves first in an *avyakta* or unmanifested form, and then in a *vyakta* or mani-

fested form, which is known either as noise or as sweet music (8).

In India, *nāda*, sound, has been recognised as the prime source of the grand structure of music, containing tonal and microtonal elements; *mūrccchanā*, elaboration of tones; articulation of tones through *varṇa*, verbal elements; *alanṁkāra*, embellishments; and many other components that make of music such a rich art.

### Music as Spiritual Aid

There is something wonderful in music. Charles Kingsley says:

Words are wonderful enough but music is more wonderful. It appeals not to our thoughts as words do, it speaks straight to our hearts and spirits, to the very core and root of our souls. Music soothes us, stirs us up; it puts noble feelings into us; it melts us to tears, we know not how; it is a language by itself just as perfect in its way as speech, as words; just as divine, just as blessed. Music has been called the speech of angels; it is the speech of God itself.<sup>6</sup>

The Haridasas used music as a medium for conveying to the masses the sublime message of the Vedas and the Upanishads: 'It was their firm conviction that God would manifest Himself when the soul craved His company through music and dance. Of all modes of apprehension of God, music was the most effective and powerful, and when employed would persuade the Remote and the Transcendental God to bless [the devotees] with His living presence' (ibid.). Of the various spiritual disciplines described in the scriptures as means to moksha, bhakti is the easiest and the most efficacious. The Bhagavata, the great bhakti scripture, describes bhakti to be of nine types: Listening to the names and glories of Bhagavan, singing the same, remembering him, serving his feet, offering ritualistic worship, obeisance to him, having the attitude of a servant or a friend of God, and total dedication to him.<sup>7</sup> Out of these nine moods, it is only kirtan, singing the praises of Bhagavan, that easily captivates all minds, as it is in the form of music.<sup>8</sup> To the Haridasas, *saṅgīta*, music,

and *sāhitya*, poetry, had the same origin and were inseparable.<sup>9</sup> Sripadaraja says in one of his *ugābhoga* compositions: ‘Dhyana in Krita [Satya] Yuga, yajna and *yajana* [oblations] in Treta Yuga, worship in Dwapara, and *gāna* [singing] in Kali Yuga are the forms of devotion to Keshava.’ The same idea is echoed by Purandaradasa: ‘Dhyana, yajna and *arcana* [worship] and kirtan are the forms through which Purandara Vitthala bestows moksha on devotee.’ Rightly has it been stated that

The philosophy of Haridasas was the realization of Paramatman through music and poetry, for the Lord is the *Samagana Priya* [lover of the singing of the Sama Veda] and both music and poetry are the *Sadhana* of *Adhyatma Vikasa* [spiritual growth]. The Lord says ‘*Mad Bhakta Yatra Gayanti tatra Tishthami*’ [I reside where my devotees sing my praise]. The Haridasas sing the praises of Hari. Bhakti was enshrined in poetry and transmuted into living excellence by music, for poetry and music were both dear to the Lord. Every Haridasa was a composer, a poet and a devotee with soulful music (ibid.).

Vyasaraja, Vadiraja, and Purandaradasa experienced the love of God through the *sadhana* of music and preached this path to humanity. They emphasized the use of the common language in bridging social divides and attaining personal purity. These saints stressed the use of music as a link between the mundane and the transcendent. They believed that music could be a means to embellish one’s life both here and in the hereafter. The Haridasa saints considered language and music to be pivotal in channelling the unstable mind to realize the Divine.<sup>10</sup> Basaveshwara says: ‘The mind of man like a monkey flies from branch to branch.’ Purandaradasa adds: ‘The mind is like a monkey and it is difficult to regulate, control, and direct it to the Divine. Sri Hari is a *gānalola* [one moved by music], *gānavinodī* [a lover of music], and *gāna* is the quintessence of all the Vedas. So, Sri Vyasaraja says, “let your mind become the strings to vibrate to celestial music and let your hands join to keep time in harmony with that music so that the Lord might listen you.”’<sup>11</sup>

Purandaradasa, considered the founder of Carnatic music, composed songs that ‘range from the most homely to the most philosophical’:

His songs are so emotional that anyone can be moved to tears. ... It is in suspended states of animation which music inspires, that [the] Bhakta sees the pillars of the forest, pyramidal mountains, columnar cliffs, as the images of a divine Architect. ... It is the function of music to idealise not only the divine nature but [also] human life. It compresses into [a] brief compass, an ideal of the moral life of man and conveys some idea of the unity, the harmony and the moral significance of the whole. Music gives the capacity not simply to reflect on what lies on the surface, but to see under it and to get at the heart of life’s mystery (127–8).

The vast corpus of kirtans composed by these saints have ‘become models of modern Kannada prose and poetry’.

At the same time, since the sixteenth century, it has been the tradition of these saints to sing these *kirtanas* to the delectation of the people, walking from place to place on foot with *tambura* in hand, despising suffering, hardship and poverty, and exhorting the people to live a life of truth, virtue, and devotion to God. At the same time, they conveyed the difficult thoughts of the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita in simple mellifluous and



melodious prose which had a direct appeal to the human heart. The Haridasas, who like the Maharashtra saints, believed in the divineness of music, as a *sadhana* of self-realisation, and regarded their own *kirtanas* and Music as twin-born—with the result that all the Haridasas turned out to be proficient in *raga*, *tala* [time and tempo], and *sruti* [tone] to make themselves eligible for the love of God; and they preached the doctrine that a Soul without music in his soul, the language of divinity, would not be able to attain salvation (98–9).

After the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire in the sixteenth century the political life of South India disintegrated. As in other fields, decline in arts like painting and sculpture led to the loss of a valuable tradition. However, all was not bleak. Even in this period of decline, music and spirituality continued to flower, mutually enriching each other, and saints like Purandaradasa and Tyagaraja touched the hearts of people with their exquisite devotional music. Tyagaraja is credited with reaffirming *gāna mārga*, music as a means to liberation:

Tyagaraja was one who underwent a poignant life of devotional and spiritual striving and by the meaning and message packed in the passages of his songs, he takes his place among the musician-saints of our country, like Kabir, and Purandaradasa. ... Among the music composers of his time, Tyagaraja was a poet, preacher and philosopher. Those that have heard his songs again and again and have been carried away by their music, have no suspicion of the wealth of idea[s] that lies underneath, like gems within the ocean. ... The gusto with which he preached and the volume of valuable wisdom and experience he impounded in his songs place him among the saints whom we revere for the service they performed by periodic spiritual rehabilitation of our land. Tyagaraja's songs will therefore be not only a huge dam storing for us our precious musical heritage, but one more of the bibles which our saints have given to the community at large for their spiritual salvation.<sup>12</sup>

In one of his songs, Tyagaraja says: 'Come one and all and sing the hundreds of gem-like melodies which Tyagaraja composed for the salvation

of humanity; songs which contain the essence of the Vedas, the six Sastras, Puranas, and Agamas, which the Bhagavatas congregate and sing forth and which show the right path to attain the bliss realised by the Yogins!' (35).

He affirms that it was due to sweet music that he could realize the Divine: *Susvarapu nāda phalamo*. Summing up, as it were, the fruits of spiritual music, he says in his song 'Sangita Jnanamu' that the knowledge of musical lore 'would confer on one wealth, fame, good conduct, grace of the Lord, love for good men, devotion and love, and above all the bliss of oneness with the Lord' (50). In his song 'Svara Raga Sudha Rasa' he says that bhakti associated with the ambrosia of *svara* [tone and accent] and *raga* is verily paradise and salvation. To know and realize the nature of *nāda*, originating from the *mūlādhāra*, is itself bliss and salvation. According to Advaita Vedānta, one attains salvation through *brahma-jñāna*, knowledge of Brahman, which may take several births. But he who has the knowledge of *rāgas* along with natural devotion is indeed a liberated soul. In his song 'Mokshamu Sada', he asserts that music in itself can secure one *jīvanmukti*, liberation in life. In numerous other songs too we find Tyagaraja glorifying music as a path to the highest goal of human life (50–2).

There is a wonderful galaxy of Indian mystics whose approach to the Divine found expression and consummation in music. Let us now briefly see how Ramprasad, the melodious mystic of Bengal, reached the highest goal through this path. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Ramprasad achieved perfection through singing. One obtains the vision of God if one sings with yearning heart.'<sup>13</sup> Ramprasad's legacy of songs, bhajans, and kirtans is a veritable spiritual treasure:

Just as Tyagaraja's *bhajans* move the hearts of hundreds and thousands of devotees in the South India, Tukaram's in the West, and Mira's in the North India, likewise Ramprasad's songs enkindle the hearts of hundreds and thousands of devotees in Bengal. As long as there would be worshippers of Sri Rama, Vithoba and 'Nandadulala' in

those parts of the country, Tyagaraja's, Tukaram's and Mira's songs would be sung; as long as Shakti-worship continues in Bengal, Ramprasad's songs will be sung.<sup>14</sup>

Ramprasad is particularly known for his songs to Mother Kali. These are not mere poetry. They display the yearning for Kali expressed in music. They are the manifestation of Kali in sound. The vibrant presence of Kali in these songs is authenticated by Sri Ramakrishna, who constantly sang them. Ramprasad asserts his devotion and protests against Divine Mother's silence. We find him 'in the mood of a sadhaka, a desperate seeker, pining for the vision of the Mother. He is convinced that the Mother is—there is never any doubt about that fundamental position—and therefore the agony is all the more acute. In a frontal manner he asks the Mother a question:

O Mother, how long would you  
make me go about  
Like the bull with blinkers on  
Round and round the oil-press?  
Tying me down to the trunk of this world  
You are incessantly making me  
go round and round  
Due to what offence, may I ask  
Have you made me a slave to the six oilmen?  
Births countless of beasts and birds and so forth  
I have seen through,  
Yet the cessation of this suffering is not in sight.  
The word 'Mother' is soaked in affection,  
The way of the world is that  
When the child weeps the Mother  
takes it on her lap,  
Am I outside the world?  
Countless sinners got delivered  
By just chanting 'Durga, Durga, Durga';  
O Mother, for just once, remove  
the blinkers from my eyes  
So that I may behold your fearless feet.  
Wicked sons there are, ever so many,  
but never a wicked Mother.  
(Keep Prasad, your wicked son,  
bent at your feet.)  
O Mother, Ramprasad hopes to stay  
at Your feet in the end (70-1).

Ramprasad saw the Mother as the only cause of the universe, and his songs faithfully reflect this vision. While frantically searching for God Sri Ramakrishna would cry before the image of Kali saying: 'You revealed yourself to Ramprasad, Mother; then why not to me? I don't want wealth, friends, relatives, enjoyments of pleasure, and so on. Reveal yourself to me' (69). And Mother did reveal herself to Sri Ramakrishna as she did to Ramprasad: 'Today we have Ramprasad's testimony reinforced by the life of Sri Ramakrishna. If the Mother is hidden from us, it is because we have not sufficiently pressed our claim and thrown ourselves wholeheartedly at her feet' (90).

### **Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Music**

Music is inseparable from Sri Ramakrishna's life and it has added to his charm. This becomes very clear as we go through the pages of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Sri Ramakrishna, says Swami Vivekananda in his famous 'Khandana-bhava-bandhana' stotra, was '*bhāsvara-bhāva-sāgara*; ocean of resplendent emotions'. Sri Ramakrishna used this powerful medium of music for various purposes: i) as an earnest aspirant longing for the vision of the Divine Mother, ii) as an aspirant singing in great joy after having the vision of the Mother, iii) as a spiritual teacher instructing his disciples and devotees.

Let us now see some of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, which are not mere words but his actual experiences, that clearly show how music can take a true spiritual aspirant to the highest goal of human life:

'If a person excels in singing, music, dancing, or any other art, he can also quickly realize God provided he strives sincerely.'<sup>15</sup> Sri Ramakrishna said to a singer: 'You are ferrying many people across the ocean of the world. How many hearts are illumined by hearing your music!' (600). At another time he said: 'One should listen to singing to awaken the inner spirit' (695). He also said: 'In the Kaliyuga the best way is bhaktiyoga, the path of devotion—singing the praises of the Lord, and prayer' (143).

As in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, in Swami Vivekananda's life also music had played a very important role, which is clearly reflected in several of his sayings:

The greatest aid to this practice of keeping God in memory is, perhaps, music. The Lord says to Narada, the great teacher of Bhakti, 'I do not live in heaven, nor do I live in the heart of the Yogi, but where My devotees sing My praise, there am I'. Music has such tremendous power over the human mind; it brings it to concentration in a moment. You will find the dull, ignorant, low, brute-like human beings, who never steady their mind for a moment at other times, when they hear attractive music, immediately become charmed and concentrated. Even the minds of animals, such as dogs, lions, cats, and serpents, become charmed with music.<sup>16</sup>

Further: 'Music is the highest art and, to those who understand, is the highest worship' (5.125). 'Drama and music are by themselves religion; any song, love song or any song, never mind; if one's whole soul is in that song, he attains salvation, just by that; nothing else he has to do; if a man's whole soul is in that, his soul gets salvation. They say it leads to the same goal' (6.102).

### **Towards the Goal of Life**

It has been pointed out that 'the realization of the immortal soul of music' is its philosophical foundation. Therefore, we ought to educate ourselves about this soul of music. Proper training and education alone can 'harmonize the chords of the phenomenal music with those of the transcendental'. Musicians should develop themselves and their music to attain the highest level of spirituality. They need to keep in mind 'the grand truth or philosophy of India that man can see God face to face, can get an immediate awareness of the Absolute, as the task of philosophy of India is to solve the riddle of the universe and to discover the ways and means to man's perfection in life'.<sup>17</sup>

Sage Yajnavalkya, the great Smriti authority, says:

*Yathā-vidhānena paṭhan  
sāma-gāyam-avicryutam;  
Sāvadhānas-tad-abhyāsāt  
param brahmādhigacchati.  
Viṇā-vādana-tattvajñāḥ  
śruti-jāti-viśāradāḥ;  
Tālajñās-cāprayāsena  
mokṣa-mārgam niyacchati.*

Intoning the *sāma* songs in proper manner and without break, and practising them with care, one attains the supreme Brahman. One thoroughly conversant with the principles of playing on the vina, and an expert in matters of intonation, melody, and time, attains without exertion the way to liberation.<sup>18</sup>

Purandaradasa says: 'God will listen to you sitting if you sing from a lying posture; He will stand to listen, if you sing sitting. He will open the gates of heaven for you, if you sing standing and dancing in raptures of joy.' Moreover, 'He who plays the strings to music, crosses the ocean of births and deaths; he who listens to music joins the category of the angels; he who sings in praise of You, experiences the Vision of the Transcendental.' Vadiraja observes: 'Blessed are they who sing the praises of the Lord, for they belong to the camp of the immortals.'<sup>19</sup> Here we are reminded of Sri Ramakrishna: 'One obtains the vision of God if one sings with yearning heart.'<sup>20</sup>

The main object of Indian music is to attain spiritual illumination. Indian music has preserved that solemn tradition and ideal all through the ages, so the authors of music have laid the greatest emphasis upon its spiritual side and said that practice of music is a sadhana which unfolds the grand mystery of human life. Music is recognized as 'spiritual food and divine blessing to men and women, and by its practice they attain immortality even while they live in mortal frames. The human soul finds in it the goal of [a] seemingly unending journey, and gets tranquillity and everlasting bliss.'<sup>21</sup> Music is one of the best means to the highest good; adopted, nurtured, and nourished with care, and followed with concentrated attention and effort, it will help us reach the goal of life.



(References on page 631)

# Indian Classical Dance and Spirituality

Shruba Mukhopadhyay

FROM A MERE GESTURE expressing feelings to a sublime experience, from a source of amusement and pleasure to a means of spiritual uplift, dance is that divine thread which connects the individual with the universal. Even though all Indian art forms have a spiritual aspect, perhaps dance is the only genre where the artist has the unique privilege of portraying through *abhinaya*, expression, not only devotion but the deity himself.

## Origin and Purpose of Indian Dance

Legend has it that dance originated from Brahma, the Supreme Creator, when he was approached by Indra and other deities to provide a means of amusement that could be seen and heard by all. 'The result of this was the fifth *Veda*, which took words from the *Rgveda*, gestures from the *Yajus*, music and chanting from the *Sama* and sentiments and emotions from the *Atharvaveda*. Unlike the other *Vedas*, this *Veda* was not taboo to the *Sudras* and its main purpose was to provide pleasure and delight both to the ear and the eye irrespective of caste.'<sup>1</sup>

This theory put forward by Bharata in his *Natya-shastra* may not be regarded as a historical fact, but as Kapila Vatsyayan points out it could have been conceived only in a society where dance enjoyed prestige and honour. 'Through this theory, Bharata attributes to dancing a divine origin, a literary and religious heritage both in thought and technique and an aesthetic secular purpose. The story of the handing over of this art by Siva to Tanduv and then to Bharata asserts the religious, literary and secular aspect of this art' (ibid.).

Humans realized that they could express their emotions—joy and sorrow, anger and love—



Manipuri dance

through disciplined movement. They noted that just as discipline and discernment were essential to organize a society that places universal happiness on a higher pedestal, far above individual happiness, the disciplined movement of dance ought also to be formalized in such a way as to transcend the barriers of mind and body for accessing a higher realm. Thus, dance was conceived as a means of dedicating oneself to the higher Self.

A God-centred character is a common feature of all dance systems of India: Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri, Odissi, Kuchipudi, and others. All Indian dances are grounded in bhakti; a majority of them originated as temple dances and were performed by *devadasis*, God's servants, for praising and pleasing God. In fact, bhakti is at the centre of all Indian arts. Indian music and dance are two important offerings to God. Though it is accepted that there are many ways to reach God, music and dance are believed to be the easiest and most dependable of all paths.

From time immemorial dance has been in India an important part of any ritual—an essential offering. Music and dance are offered with the same



Kathakali performance

spirit of devotion and surrender as other materials of worship: flowers, incense, camphor, sweets, and the like. And it is not only the devotee who dances before God, the Indian mind was so captivated by the beauty and serenity of movements that it also had the gods themselves dancing. Besides, later thinkers sought to explain natural phenomena in terms of dancing, problems of the world through the symbolism of rhythmic movements, and even questions pertaining to the Atman and the jiva in the vocabulary of dance, as is seen in the Bhagavata.

From Indra, who has been called the leader of dancers in the Rig Veda, all the divinities of the Hindu pantheon have themselves danced on one occasion or the other. Most of the gods—Ganesha, Murugan, Kali, Saraswati, Krishna—have their *nritya-murti*, dance forms. To top it all, there is the Supreme Bhagavan Shiva as *nataraja*, king of dancers. The story of the gopis dancing with Sri Krishna is nothing but an allegory of the human

soul dancing with the Infinite. Radha's dance with Sri Krishna is nothing but the jiva's union with Paramatman. Dance was an integral part of temple rituals and there were temple dancers as well—this is not something that happened by chance, it was the direct result of a continuous process of thought and living. As Vatsyayan observes:

Nowhere are we made so aware of the rich religious background, the vast literary heritage and yet entirely aesthetic purpose of an art form, as we are in a classical dance performance, whether it is Bharatanatyam or Kathakali or Manipuri or Odissi. The artist of this dance never seeks to express personal human emotions or subjective states of mind; he or she is constantly representing themes relating to gods and goddesses—Siva and Parvati, Krisna and Radha and the apsaras—and the pangs and yearnings of these supernatural beings who pine more than the human beings. If the human or the subjective is represented at all, it is only the devotees' love for the One, the Almighty, not the separation of the mortal lover from the beloved. The themes of dance in which ever style invariably relate to the lives of divine beings, their battles and epic conflicts; never are they the sociological problems of the day (ibid.).

But the ultimate tribute to the art of dancing is provided by Bhagavan Nataraja performing the cosmic dance. As Ananda Coomaraswamy says: 'Whatever the origins of Siva's dance, it became in time the clearest image of the *activity* of God which any art or religion can boast of.'<sup>2</sup> The essential significance of Shiva's dance is threefold: First, his dance is taken as the source and image of all movements within the cosmos; second, the purpose of his dance is to release the countless souls of human beings from maya or illusion; third, the place of the dance, Chidambaram, the centre of the universe, is within the heart.

Of the various dance performances of Shiva, Coomaraswamy has written about an evening dance in the Himalayas where 'Saraswati plays on the *vina*, Indra on the flute, Brahma holds the time-marking cymbals, Lakshmi begins a song, Vishnu plays on a drum and all the gods stand

round about' (ibid.). The other well-known dances of Shiva are the Tandava and the Nadanta. While the Tandava is performed in cemeteries and burning ghats, where the ten-armed Shiva dances spiritedly with the Devi, the Nadanta is held before the assembly in the golden hall of Chidambaram. 'The dance, in fact, represents His five activities (Pancakritya), viz: *Shrishi* (overlooking, creation, evolution), *Sthiti* (preservation, support), *Samhara* (destruction, evolution), *Tirobhava* (veiling, embodiment, illusion and also, giving rest), *Anugraha* (release, salvation, grace). These, separately considered, are the activities of the deities Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and Sadashiva' (87).

### Dance as a Spiritual Practice

Can dance be defined? Experts believe that if taken to a level of perfection dance can become a symbol of the universal energy, the voice and movement of God. Eminent Bharatanatyam dancer Balasaraswati says: 'Dance is the natural and therefore universal activity of the human species through which it finds unity with the cosmos and its creator. The cosmos is the dynamic expression, in orderly and beautiful movement, of the static source, the one supreme spirit.'<sup>3</sup>

For her, Bharatanatyam is a yoga, a spiritual discipline to control the wayward mind and perfect it to thought-free serenity. The expertise of the artist enables him or her to gain the equipoise of yoga in a rapid change of differing moods. Single-minded contemplation is difficult even when there is no activity. In Bharatanatyam actions are not avoided, but it is the harmony of various actions that results in the concentration we seek.

The Kuchipudi dancer Kaushalya Reddy says that the act of standing on a plate and dancing on it symbolizes detachment from all earthly connections. 'The dancer gets so engrossed in the rhythm as she has to produce the sound the percussionist is playing and concentrate on her balance that all other worldly thoughts simply disappear from her mind.'

Balasaraswati also refers to this concentration amidst intense action when she says:

The feet keeping to time, hands expressing gesture, the eye following the hand with expression, the ear listening to the dance master's music and the dancer's own singing—by harmonizing these five elements the mind achieves concentration and attains clarity in the very richness of participation. The inner feeling of the dancer is the sixth sense which harnesses these five mental and mechanical elements to create the experience and enjoyment of beauty (ibid.).

It is this spark which gives the dancer a sense of freedom in the midst of the rigid discipline of dance. Comparing a dancer with a yogi, the danseuse says that the dancer brings together the feet, hands, eyes, ears, and singing into a fusion that transforms the serenity of the yogi into a torrent of beauty. Just as in yoga exercises, the dancer's body, in the process of making rhythmic movements, is cleansed of its human weaknesses and is purified into a conduit of the spiritual and the beautiful.

Bharatanatyam dance



Revealing her own experience during performances, Balasaraswati further says:

Even for an ordinary being like myself, on some occasions and in some measure, dance and music have enabled a deep experience of the presence of God. This experience may occur only once in a while but when it does, for that little duration, its grandeur enters the soul not transiently but with a sense of eternity. As one gets involved in the art, with greater and greater dedication, one can continuously experience throughout the few hours of the dance, this unending joy, this complete well-being, especially when music and dance mingle indistinguishably (10).

To eminent Bharatanatyam dancer and researcher Padma Subramaniam, dancing is like meditation. She says: 'When you are learning Bharatanatyam you have to train each and every limb for that perfect movement. But when you are dancing, you have to forget your body. The body consciousness is simply not there.' Recalling her experience in one of her village shows where she injured her foot while dancing, Padma says she did not even feel the pain, 'it was a big nail and it [her foot] was bleeding, but I did not feel it. Only after I finished my performance, I could see it and feel the pain. It happened because body consciousness was not there' (ibid.). Dance can give wings to an aspiring soul to soar higher; and for Padma, her research on Bharata's *Natyashastra* was not just an intellectual exercise but a spiritual journey.


It is also the responsibility of the performer to allow the *rasika*, the well-informed audience, to get a feel of this spiritual transformation. In their shared involvement, the dancer and the spectator are both released from worldly woes and experience the divine joy of the art with a total sense of freedom. 'That is why', Kaushalya says, 'several times I have seen spectators being moved to tears after our dance on *vishwarupa darshana* or Krishna Lila, as if they have viewed the Lord himself on the stage.' However, it all depends on the calibre of the performer.

According to *Natyashastra*, every place where dances are staged is transformed into a temple

because all *devatas*, gods, congregate there to appreciate the performance. That is precisely the reason why *avahana*, invocation, is such an important part of classical dance.

Every performance of Kuchipudi will start with *vandana*, adoration, of Ganapati, Shiva, or Vishnu. Through this dance form the artiste narrates a story either from mythology or the Krishna Lila or the Draupadi Chiraharana (Disrobing of Draupadi). Kaushalya says: 'Kuchipudi is unique in the sense that here the dancer is not only portraying a character, he or she is actually living it. Thus while performing Krishna Lila, the artiste is not only referring to Vasudeva, but actually becoming the Lord himself. It is a complete transformation as the dancer forgets his or her personality, the lesser self.'

While choosing a theme Padma is always selective—she picks up ideas from the Advaita philosophy or the Bhagavadgita. Her favourite subject is Sri Krishna as *purna avatara*, the perfect incarnation, where she seeks to portray the multifaceted personality of the deity. But how can a dancer experience freedom in the midst of the constraints and discipline of classical dance? 'Dance is like language,' says Padma, 'you learn the grammar and then what you write is your choice. Surely, you cannot write poetry by looking into a dictionary. In dance, the rules are like grammar and having a thorough proficiency in grammar will help one to become more creative.'

In sum, from the Indian perspective, dance is not merely an art or even an expression of emotions. It is a *sadhana* to bring an aesthetic order to an otherwise haphazard life. Through this *sadhana* the dancers commune with the Divine. Therein lies the fulfilment and perfection of dance. 

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# Entrances and Gateways to the Indian Pilgrimage

Dr Kapila Vatsyayan

**W**HAT TRIBUTE CAN ONE PAY Sri Ramakrishna, the great seer and saint of our times, on the auspicious occasion of his 175th birth anniversary? His gaze was comprehensive. From the earth to the sky, from the flowing waters of the Ganga to the universal shakti of the Divine Mother Kali, he saw God in all Creation. For him, as he often said in his conversations, God permeates the animate and the inanimate world. He stressed that one could not take the part to be the whole. In one illuminative moment he said:

He who has attained God knows that it is God who has become all this. Then he sees that God, maya, living beings, and the universe form one whole. God includes the universe and its living beings. Suppose you have separated the shell, flesh, and seeds of a bel-fruit and someone asks you the weight of the fruit. Will you leave aside the shell and the seeds, and weigh only the flesh? Not at all. To know the real weight of the fruit, you must weigh the whole of it—the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. Only then can you tell its real weight.<sup>1</sup>

He then explained this metaphor:

The shell may be likened to the universe, and the seeds to living beings. While one is engaged in discrimination one says to oneself that the universe and the living beings are non-Self and unsubstantial. At that time one thinks of the flesh alone as the substance, and the shell and seeds as unsubstantial. But after discrimination is over, one feels that all three parts of the fruit together form a unity. Then one further realizes that the stuff that has produced the flesh of the fruit has also produced the shell and seeds. To know the real nature of the bel-fruit one must know all three (328).



Entrance to Arunachaleswara temple, Tiruvannamalai

What Sri Ramakrishna said is a seminal truth of the many manifestations of Indian art. Neither Indian architecture nor Indian sculptures—the images of Shiva, Vishnu, or Devi, for instance—can be broken up into categories or understood in terms of only their formal elements, poses, and gestures. They have to be absorbed as a whole.

Indian art is a spiritual experience, although through a different trajectory. Art in India, particularly Indian architecture, is also akin to a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is undertaken with the purpose of ascending from the mundane to the spiritual in a constant attempt at refinement, elevation, and merger with the Divine, which transcends not only the mundane but also symbolizes the whole, as Sri Ramakrishna said.

In this brief and modest tribute to the Great Master I have put down some thoughts on how gateways—whether they are the *toranas* of the

stupa or the gopuras of the South Indian temples—are not only doors to a physical journey but also to a spiritual journey from the outside to the inside, from outer sunshine to inner enlightenment.

### Universal Structures

The Indian landscape is interspersed with monuments made in wood, brick, and stone, each symbolizing the human journey to the Divine—known and unknown, concrete and abstract, but in the last analysis the formless and unmanifest. Awareness of the eternal waters which sustain humans, the earth which supports them, the heaven and ether which protect them, and the cardinal directions and space which circumscribe them led them to recreate the cosmos in words, stones, line, paint, colour, sound, and movement. Each time they recreate for a particular duration of physical time—a few moments or a whole day, week, month, or year, a cosmos on earth in its never-ending rhythm of creation, evolution, and destruction.

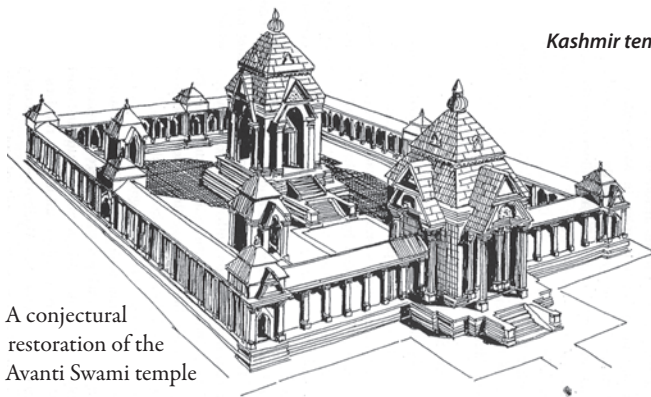
The homes, cities, temples, stupas, churches, and mosques humans built in permanent material also articulated this self-conscious awareness of their life on earth and their journey towards the Infinite, the Divine, the Unmanifest. In each case the structure would first require the establishment of a centre

corresponding to the seed, *bija*, the mythical navel of the earth as also of the human body; thereafter came an immediate enclosure, a square or circle encasing the centre; a larger outer space lay next; and finally there was the outermost space, with gateways that represented the cardinal directions. Thus, the entire building space was differentiated from the mundane secular space outside. The enclosure was a hallowed sacred space and a pathway to the Divine. The sacred space extended vertically too: the seed at the centre emerging as the tree, the pillar, *stambha*, which finally reached the pinnacle. Sacred architecture of all faiths followed these essential principles.

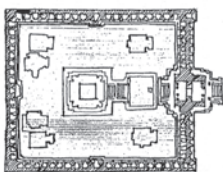
This primary conception of consecrating time and space through either ephemeral or perennial art sums up the universal conceptions underlying both gateways and shrines; and these conceptions were known to all cultures at all times. Although the remains of Mohenjo-daro and Harappan culture are fragmentary, it is clear that the citadel of Mohenjo-daro must have had a grand entry. The Vedas speak in many beautiful hymns of the eternal waters, earth, heaven, ether, fire, and the lords of the directions, *dik-palas*—humans have always invoked the elements for protection. The rituals of the Brahmanas concretized those conceptions by delimiting space in the shape of an enclosure, *shala*, in

which were established the three fires—domestic, terrestrial, and celestial—in the shapes of a semicircle, circle, and square respectively. The sacred altar was built with bricks of different sizes. Through incantations and chants, ablutions and rituals, the cosmos was recreated for seven, eleven, or twenty-one days, and finally destroyed. The multiple forms merged back to the formless; dust unto dust was the culmination. The ritual over, mundane

Kashmir temple: Gandhara style

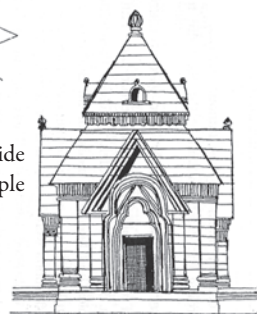


A conjectural restoration of the Avanti Swami temple



Typical small countryside Hindu temple

Plan of the above temple



time and space returned. In terms of structures and as an outward symbol of this inner process, the outer enclosure, the three fires, and the circumscription of space were essential.

With time, the Vedic ritual carried out in open areas gave place to the daily worship performed inside monuments. The earliest archaeological remains of the historical period manifest the human aspiration and need to relate to the elements and to the vegetative, animal, human, and celestial worlds all around. Later, many religions were founded and each was responsible for giving a distinctive expression to those fundamental concerns. The language, form, shape, design, and architectural style were different, but the underlying unity was unmistakable.

### **Divine Gateways**

An outstanding feature of all these edifices—big or small, domestic or sacred, of perishable or durable materials—were the entrances, single or multiple, attached to them. In domestic architecture the single entrance led to the centre of the home, the inner courtyard. In the plan of the city, the roads led out to the cardinal directions and converged on a central place, usually the sacred centre of the city—a shrine, a stupa, a temple, or a mosque.

In Hindu temples and Buddhist stupas each entrance was guarded by a specific deity. The east, south, west, and north had their particular deities—they represented their domains on the four slopes of the quadrangular central mountain of the universe. In the Indian tradition it is believed that Mount Sumeru rises from the midpoint of the earth's surface as the vertical axis of the egg-shaped cosmos. The slopes of this mountain are peopled by a multitude of life: aquatic creatures like crocodiles, serpents, and fish; aquatic vegetation like the beautiful lotus; and the land animals, particularly deer, elephants, and monkeys. Gnomes, dwarfs, and yakshas, as well as the flying celestial female apsaras and male gandharvas follow. On the quadrangular summit stands the palatial abode of the gods, who are deathless, *amara*—for this reason the summit is known as Amaravati, the immortal town.

This mythology of Mount Sumeru and Amaravati was adapted in the early Buddhist stupas of India to commemorate the life and preaching of Buddha. The gateways represent the four quarters protecting the sacred world. The human figures or deities carved on the gateways are called *loka-palas*, protectors of the world. They stand and guard the four entrances of the railings of Buddhist stupas. As Buddha's doctrine spread, these deities of the four quarters also travelled far and became integral to the architectural designs of monuments in China, Korea, Japan, and Indonesia.

The most impressive amongst the early Buddhist monuments are the sites of Bharhut and Sanchi. The stupas have a simple form. Their interior is a compact heap of earth, pebbles, or stones enclosed by a layer of bricks; the bricks are in turn covered with a facade of polished stone. One or several terraces, quadrangular or circular, can form the base, *madhi*, and around this base there is enough space for clockwise circumambulation. The whole structure is enclosed by a railing, *vedika*, of wood or stone. In the case of both Bharhut and Sanchi, it is stone. These railings have vertical pillars, *stambhas*, and interlinked horizontal beams. Finally, there is a coping or a crown symbolizing a diadem or a turban. Staircases, *sopana*, may lead to terraces surrounding the central bulwark called the egg, *anda*, or the womb, *garbha*, which contains the seed, *bija*, namely the relic. It is crowned by a quadrangular housing or terrace, *harmika*, above which rises one or several canopies, *chhatra*. The stupa is a symbol of enlightenment and the vehicle carrying the message of Buddha to the four quarters. The stupa is also an instrument—a design, a yantra—for the guidance of devotees who take the upward journey of the soul by circumambulating clockwise the structure in a reverent attitude, to finally ascend to the top.

The gates and railings of Bharhut and Sanchi represent the beginning of this spiritual journey. They are richly carved with reliefs that illustrate the world with its vegetation and its aquatic and terrestrial life. Among these are the reliefs of the vase of fullness, *purna kumbha*, which stands for fertility

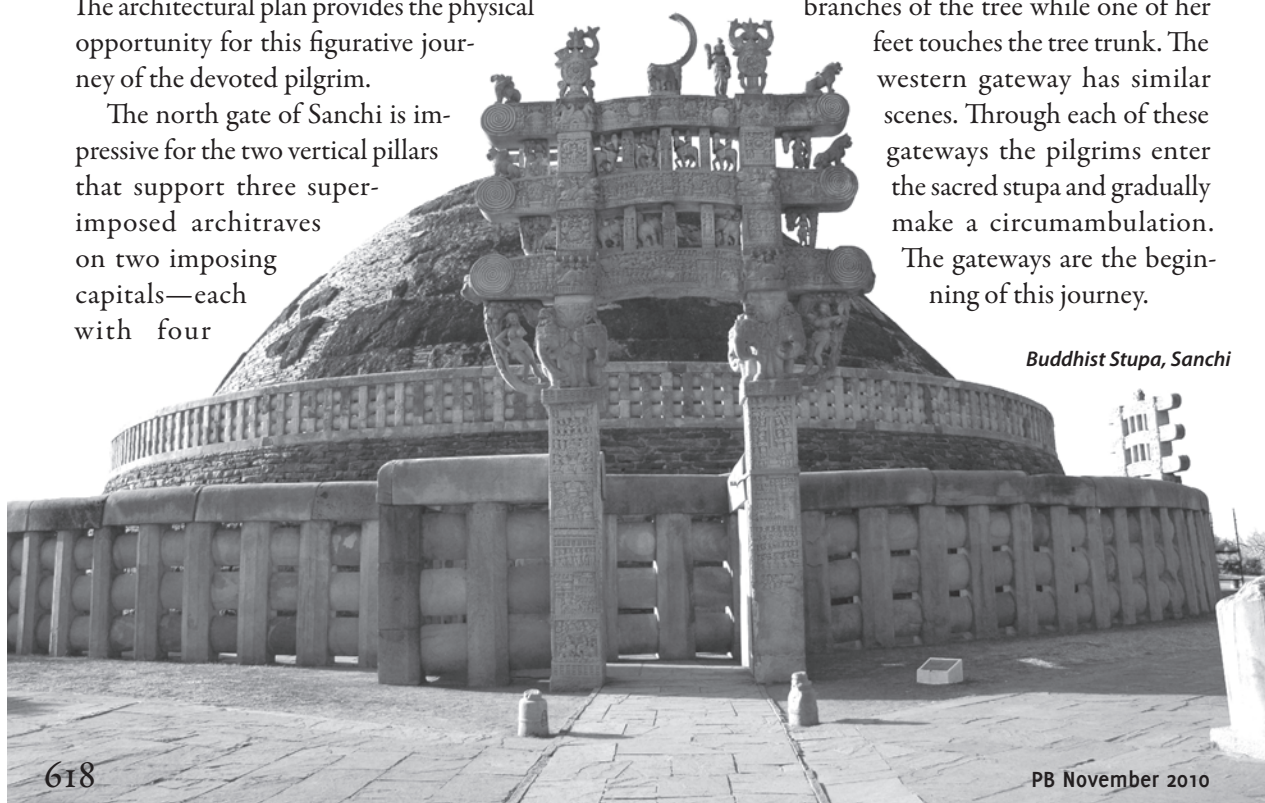
and fulfilment. Also there is an abundance of reliefs of the lotus, which symbolizes the cosmic order, and of the wheel, which represents the first preaching of Buddha's doctrine. There are beautiful animals, rows of elephants and deer, and winged lions. This is the mundane world, *samsara*, from where pilgrims begin their journey—plenty and abundance lead them to restraint and the desire to know the past lives of the bodhisattva. Therefore, the horizontal and vertical columns of the gateways depict in profusion the numerous lives of Buddha in his journey towards enlightenment. The Jatakas depicting Buddha as Mahakapi, Mahajanaka, Vessantara, Saddanta, and innumerable other beings are seen in the reliefs in the architraves in Sanchi as well as in the railing medallions in Bharhut. All these reliefs are symbolic of the devotees' personal journey. When pilgrims reach the crowning terrace, they have anticipated in a figurative way their own enlightenment and the extinction of all their passions, which fetter them to the round of rebirth. The didactic function of the stupa is clear in all the stupas ranging from Sanchi in India to Borobudur in Java. The architectural plan provides the physical opportunity for this figurative journey of the devoted pilgrim.

The north gate of Sanchi is impressive for the two vertical pillars that support three superimposed architraves on two imposing capitals—each with four

elephants back to back. Each of the faces of these pillars and architraves is richly decorated with reliefs illustrating Buddhist legends. The southern gateway is similar to the northern. On the outside of the upper architrave there is a beautiful standing figure of Lakshmi with two elephants surrounded by a luxurious atmosphere of water, vegetation, and birds. On the middle architrave there is a panoramic view of Ashoka's visit to the stupa of Ramagrama. And on the lowest architrave there are six dwarfs with spouting lotus stalks amongst leaves, buds, and lotus flowers. On the eastern gateway there are depictions of some of the Buddhist symbols: the young elephant representing conception, the tree symbolizing enlightenment, and the wheel of the doctrine. In the middle architrave is seen the great renunciation—a riderless horse suggesting Buddha's departures from the palace. The lowest architrave depicts Ashoka followed by a crowd of warriors and servants—he steps down from the kneeling elephant to worship the sacred bo tree. *Yakshini*, the dryad, is the most outstanding figure here. Her arms are intertwined with the

branches of the tree while one of her feet touches the tree trunk. The western gateway has similar scenes. Through each of these gateways the pilgrims enter the sacred stupa and gradually make a circumambulation. The gateways are the beginning of this journey.

Buddhist Stupa, Sanchi




### Gateways to Enlightenment

Elsewhere in India, instead of the four gateways there are impressive entrances and facades to rock caves. Bhaja and Karle caves in western India have stupendous entrances leading the pilgrim into a cave-like structure with a basilican plan, nearly sixty feet long and twenty-five feet high. At the end of the cave is the altar in the form of a stupa, around which the devotees can walk. The facade of Karle is decorated with massive figures in high relief. Outstanding amongst these are those depicting couples who seem to be flying in the air, the flowing curves of their bodies soaring towards the heavens. These rock-cut caves of India were the abode of monks; famous monasteries were established here. The horseshoe facade and the entrance were a single unit, with only one source of light—again suggesting metaphorically the journey of the pilgrim to the Divine. These cool half-dark vaults receive dim light through the entrance above. Occasionally there is an additional vaulted upper window. Pure space without matter, weight, or any figurative sculpture inside invites devotees to enter into the sphere of nirvana and face the symbol of their outer extinction and inner enlightenment—the small stupa within denotes nirvana.

The gateways and entrances are an essential part of the architectures of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain monuments. In Ajanta and Ellora there are facades, single entrances, and gates, if not gateways. At the Kailasanatha temple of Ellora, also a masterpiece of rock-cut architecture, the pilgrim is greeted with two figures of the water deities Ganga and Yamuna. One stands on a crocodile and the other on a tortoise; both represent the gateway to Mount Kailas or Hemavata. Ganga and Yamuna are the entries in the journey to spiritual ascension. All sanctuaries in India—from Kailasanatha in Ellora to the medieval temples in the plains of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, to the temples in Assam—the two water goddesses representing the two mighty rivers are carved on the entrance gates of temples.

The figures of Ganga and Yamuna as guardians of the entrances continue to be popular. In addition, however—particularly in South Indian, In-

doonesian, and Cambodian temples—there are also the fierce figures of the *dvara-palas*, doorkeepers. They ward off evil and protect the innermost shrine. Sometimes they are simple warriors seen in their Indian, Chinese, or Japanese garbs; at other times they are weird fearsome demons that guard and frighten. Figuratively, they are the demons within the human psyche who have to be reckoned with and ultimately conquered before taking the inner journey towards enlightenment.

Devotees enter the South Indian temples through their massive gateways, gopuras, as if they were entering a fort. The door lintels are also richly carved with minor and major deities as well as with the life of the vegetative, aquatic, terrestrial, and celestial worlds. But the dominant figures are the *dvara-palas*, who ride elephants, lions, or other mythical beings. The great gopuras overlook the four directions from the outermost enclosure—as in Sanchi, though now enlarged a hundredfold. The temple is the temporary abode of the gods on earth, their fort on earth, or a recreation of the cosmos. The central shrine is metaphorically the Sumeru or Kailas. Devotees enter through the gateways to take this journey, circumambulate the larger outer spaces, move inward into smaller enclosures, and finally enter the *garbha-griha*, the womb house, and the sanctum, which represents the seed of all Creation. From outer light devotees move inward into areas of physical darkness. The natural light gradually diminishes. From the world of multitudes of forms—the ignorance and darkness of the physical state—devotees move towards the shrine, which brings inner light. The doors of perception are opened physically and psychically through the gateways, entrances and facades, the mythical goddesses of the waters, and the guardians of the stupas and the temples. They are the starting point of the pilgrim's journey towards enlightenment. 

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# *The Spiritual in Art*

**Prof. Amal Ghosh**

**A**RT HAS ALWAYS HAD a unique position in being one of the most important elements in spiritual life. It had a historical role and a divine function when it was used solely for religious purposes. In those times it was normative for art to be an important element in spiritual life. These days spirituality of that sort does not seem very evident either in art or in other aspects of life in general. It is my personal opinion that for an art object to be defined as spiritual it should evoke some sort of subliminal response, some sort of depth of recognition of 'otherness' in the viewer; it should be capable of transporting them to a different place. And this article is necessarily just a personal reflection on the relationship between art and spirituality.

## ***Defining the Spiritual in Art***

The moment one tries to confront this concept of the spiritual in the context of art, complex and often contradictory issues which are actually unresolvable arise. In the first instance, although I have a working definition, it is almost impossible to define this concept with any precision. It is, in fact, easier to say what it does not mean. Firstly, it does not mean 'religious'. There is an enormous volume of religious visual two- and three-dimensional art which has ritualistic, devotional, or cultic functions, but which does not hit the spot in any attempt at evoking the spiritual as I have initially and personally defined it. 'Spiritual' does not mean non-commercial; some artists actually make art with an intention of evoking a subliminal spiritual response, and some of these may be so effective that the work achieves a considerable commercial and investment value. I would define Mark Rothko (1903–70) as an artist in this category. It also does not mean 'abstract', although the actual definition of a category of art

as 'spiritual' was initially derived from the work of various European and American abstract painters. But there is much abstract art that produces an opposite effect. It does not have to be representational; indeed in the formal categorization of the work of abstract artists who first formally added 'spiritual' to the different twentieth-century categories of art, it cannot be representational.

The confusion is further complicated since two or more people are involved in the judgement: the artist or creator and the viewer(s) or perceiver(s) of the art. It also follows that as different people respond differently, what may for one person be an object of spiritual veneration may for another be just an item, more or less commercially valuable, of decorative furniture. The spiritual dimension in art also crosses cultural boundaries. Much of tantric art evokes a response from viewers from widely different cultures, as does much of the calligraphic art and architecture of Islamic culture. The whole purpose of stained glass windows in medieval European cathedrals was also intended for the enlightenment and spiritual transportation of the viewer.

The other side of the coin is the intention of the artist or creator. But even artists with spiritual intentions may not actually succeed in achieving this objective in their art, while other artists may produce, without intending to do so, works whose contemplative qualities can transport a viewer to a different level of perception and contemplation. In my view such an artist is Van Gogh. There is currently a superb exhibition of his works at the Royal Academy in London which provides a unique opportunity to re-appraise his work in the context of his creative intentions. It is apparent that though Van Gogh was not consciously thinking of the spiritual in art, he was nevertheless steeped and imbued

with a deep inner need that triggered these great works. Visiting the exhibition prompted in at least this viewer the recognition of a spiritual dimension in many of the works. In his isolated and often very humble dwelling, Van Gogh created a succession of master works unsullied by the passage of time. Even today they look fresh and other worldly. This deep, sage-like, one-minded concentration amounts, in my view, to a state of spiritual grace.

Thus, in terms of my fairly ad hoc definition, spiritual art can be abstract, representational, two-dimensional, three-dimensional, religious or non-religious, from any cultural background, and even independent of the intention of the artist as long as it is able to evoke some sort of subliminal response and depth of recognition of 'otherness' in the viewer, although not necessarily every viewer.

### Contemporary History of the Spiritual in Art

With this level of complexity it is hard to know where to begin, but as modern art was being formally produced and defined as spiritual in the twentieth century in America and Europe, I shall begin with a brief overview of these artists and their ideas. I have also decided to follow this up by examining the work of two artists who are known to me personally, whose work intention was to produce the response I have described as 'spiritual'—whether they failed or succeeded is a different matter. They include an Indian artist, Dharendra Nath Brahma, who actually encapsulates spiritual intention in his work, and a British artist, Cecil Collins, whose entire artistic output and personal philosophy has been the transformation of the viewers' perception in relation to the spiritual.

Historically speaking, European art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began to explore ideas of the spiritual in art as defined above. Artists used abstract painting to reflect their desire to express the spiritual, utopian, or metaphysical ideas that they felt could not be expressed in traditional pictorial terms. Between 1907 and 1915 painters in Europe and the United States began

to create completely abstract works of art. Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Frantisek Kupka (1871–1957), Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), and Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935) were the forerunners of abstract art based on spiritual issues and beliefs.

It was the Russian Wassily Kandinsky who introduced the idea of the 'spiritual in art' as a distinct category of artistic expression when he wrote *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* in 1912. This is perhaps the most important and influential doctrine posited by a twentieth-century artist. Kandinsky was born in Moscow in 1866 into a well-to-do aristocratic family. The family's wealth supported him during his long years of study. He studied political economy and law in Moscow, turned down a professorship in Estonia, and went to Munich to study painting when he was thirty years old. He formed several arts groups and joined the most radical painters of Europe. He was the first modern painter with the intuitive and spiritual freedom to eliminate entirely the hindrance of intellect from the art of vision.

Kandinsky painted unfathomable beauty with the sole use of the spirit and an intuitive sense of the cosmic order. He created absolute forms for the realization of spiritual joy and the sole purpose of elative beauty. Kandinsky speaks of the artist as having 'a secret power of vision' and of art as

Wassily Kandinsky



longing to the spiritual life'. But he was not elitist about art. He wrote that 'to feel the beauty of art, the layman does not have to know the various modes of painting'. Because of his profound influence on European art, he has been recognized as the 'father of spiritual art in Europe'.<sup>1</sup>

Arthur James Eddy, writing in 1914, also reflected the interests of abstract artists in expressing the spiritual: 'Pure art speaks from soul to soul. It does not depend on imitative forms. Spiritual art springs from the soul and is produced by the inner need.'<sup>2</sup> Spiritual art is a mystical inner construction, transmitting inner meaning through the 'quality of the whole', available only when 'the proper set of mind and feelings towards it have been activated' (134). The main value of the spiritual lies in contemplative communication: 'It is part of a religious life and a conscious acceptance of the purity of spirit.'

Spiritual art involves art that is 'pure', which no longer represents but 'presents' out of an inner necessity the mystical 'inner construction'; and the 'inner necessity' has the purpose of spiritual expression.<sup>3</sup> It has the power of transforming the perception of an ordinary object to create an understanding of different kinds of meanings. It can demonstrate with sensitive perception the hidden connection in the unity of the material and immaterial. For example, Mark Rothko (1903–70) talks about creating a silence in his paintings, and his profound paintings are a feast of mysticism and a spiritual experience as well. Their transcendental beauty and spiritual intensity transports the viewer to a different realm.

A new interest in the spiritual arose in the West in the late 1960s with two exhibitions focusing on tantric diagrams as sources of abstract art. The first of these exhibitions titled 'Fifty Years of Tantric Art' was held at Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1969. There, diagrams were presented as yantras. This was followed by a popular exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1971. At first it seemed that these exhibitions re-awakened and re-established the potent power of visual abstraction as a spiritual source in art. But this feeling turned out to be short lived. The contemporary problem

of art with a sense of the spiritual is that it has to defend itself and to articulate the core value of its products in a commercial, antithetical, and hostile socio-economic environment.

Consequently, abstract art, which at one point was developed to counter materialism, has now itself become part of the materialistic world. The materialistic philosophy of society has reduced art to another ordinary communication and denied any spiritual connection to the artist who wishes to join in the mainstream of social communication through the spiritual. A successful work of art is unique and can have a high market value. Paintings are among the most costly human-made objects and have come to symbolize status and commercial value. The neglect of 'inner meaning' has created a condition of 'art for arts sake', and the spiritual gifts of contemporary art have almost disappeared. The arts of easy communication have gained the upper hand and have created a commodity that is readily marketable, either as understood by the masses or propelled by curators and major art purchasers, as vehicles of investment. Thus, a single Van Gogh painting is worth millions of dollars today. But during Van Gogh's lifetime his work did not sell and he was supported throughout his life by his brother Theo.

### **Two Spiritual Artists**

Given the situation narrated above, it should not be a surprise that the two artists that I have chosen to concentrate on, in relation to the spiritual in art, are not and have not been commercial successes or achieved the full recognition I believe they deserve. I have chosen to focus on them because knowing them at a personal level perhaps gives me a greater insight into their work and motivations as individuals. Both were my tutors and later became my mentors, so I have a more intimate knowledge of them as both artists and individuals. This, I believe, enables me to focus on their work with more personal understanding. Dharendra Nath Brahma was my undergraduate tutor at the Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata. Cecil Collins was the tutor in charge of my three-year postgraduate study at

Central School of Art and Craft—now Central St Martin's College, University of the Arts, London.

Both these artists have made the notion of spirituality in art pivotal to their practice over many years, sustaining a strong belief and understanding that amounts to the spiritual. The lives of both these persons were shaped by the ethos of spirituality. The art world neglected them; this only made their convictions about their chosen paths more fundamental to their respective lives. They have both taken the lonely path of the seeker and have been prepared to forfeit commercial success and the acceptance of the artistic community, although both have eventually achieved a degree of recognition, especially Cecil Collins.

**Dhirendra Nath Brahma** • Every year, when I visit Kolkata, I have a deep need to spend time with Dhirenbabu, though this proves to be a combination of the exhilarating and the totally exhausting. His depth of knowledge and understanding is overwhelming. Yet, one almost feels as if he does not exist in this world. He is hardly aware of his physical surroundings and works in a tiny space with myriads of mosquitoes around.

His initial understanding of art developed from a deep awareness of it being a part of every aspect of life in the villages of Bengal. Right from a young age he watched his mother performing ceremonies, making ritual drawings with rice paste and flowers, and decorating household images with garlands, ornaments, and coloured fabrics. And as art has a profound func-

tion in life he experimented with the traditional style and technique of Indian painting, of which he has been a strong proponent. But for the last two decades, or more, he has explored new and uncharted possibilities from the deep reservoir of the Indian tradition: symbolic forms and marks, intricate small paintings. If they are not viewed with an inner perception, they could be rejected as mere calligraphy—it is the deeper and penetrating look that reveals different dimensions, new vistas that open passages to the inner world for the seeker.

Dhirenbabu's symbols have a resonance with ancient tantric figures. However, he does not use them merely as traditional symbols. He juxtaposes and integrates them through dynamic fluid passages with deep meaning. A sacred word provides a glimpse of another dimension, and the work becomes potent, becomes a true work of art. If art has something more than outward beauty, these works bend that inner power and intensity to create a master work. To the inner eye of the artist's enquiring mind were revealed a number of symbols communicating ideas of inner realization and leading to visible forms with deep meaningful motifs.

This development has taken his work to an inner world with a deep spiritual perspective. A fastidious and insistent process of exploration and experience pursued throughout his life helped Dhirenbabu understand the 'other' meaning of marks—whether symbol, script, or scribble. The visible world is tempting in being acceptable to many, but the active seek-

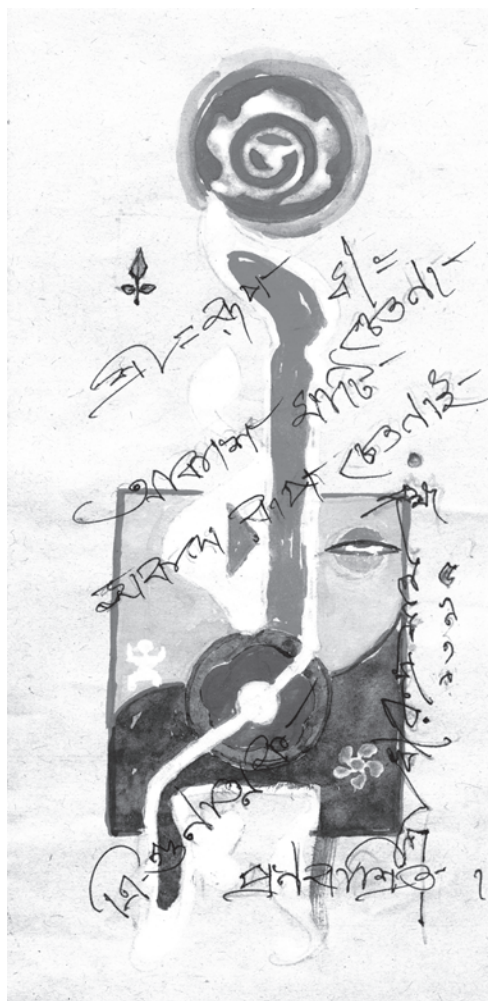


IMAGE: 'SRI EQUALS BEAUTY', DHIRENDRA NATH BRAHMA

inner depth can reveal an intimate relationship to that other world which is accessible only to the sincere seeker. In the catalogue for his one-person show at Horizon Gallery, London, in 1987, Dr Kalyan Kumar Ganguly, Rani Bagiswari Professor, University of Kolkata, wrote that 'looking at the paintings in this exhibition, there comes from the inner eye of the enquiring mind, sacred symbols held as readably communicable ideas of deep realization—a combination of visible form with intense inner meaning'. The titles of the works are indicative of the intention: 'Goodman, God man', 'Fusion: unity', 'Cheat Not Oppress Not'. They provide an active glimpse into how the vision of the artist has turned from the outer world to the diverse expanse of the inner perspective. Dhirenbabu's later works disclose an intimate relationship with Indian philosophy. They provide access to a visual world that draws discerning viewers away from and beyond the perspective of the visible world.

The director of the Birmingham museum saw the exhibition at Horizon Gallery and invited Dhirenbabu to exhibit his works in Birmingham. Viewers were surprised to find that this solo exhibition provided an ambience of peace and tranquillity as well as a great feeling of happiness. The demand for his workshops was an indication of the esteem in which the audience held these works. These calligraphy-like works are unique examples of intuitive wisdom and knowledge; they are masterpieces. The recognition that Dhirenbabu achieved in Europe is not perhaps reflected in India. Only recently has his work—as a teacher who has inspired generations of students and remained dedicated to an ideal—been formally recognized. I was privileged to be present when he was made professor emeritus of the Kolkata University and of the Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata.

**Cecil Collins** • As was the case with Dharendra Nath Brahma, Cecil Collins's deep understanding of art as involving the totality of life was born of his early childhood experiences in the natural world surrounding his parental home. He coined the word 'seed experience' to describe how his childhood ex-

perience of the woods behind his house was the source of the inspiration that lasted, as well as sustained, his whole life. Cecil Collins was born in Plymouth in England in 1908. He studied at the Royal College of Art and taught at Dartington Hall, Devon, where he made friends with Mark Toby (1890–1976). Mark Toby is best known for his distinguished mystical and oriental technique and aesthetics. 'White writing' was the hallmark of this refined abstractionist who anticipated Jackson Pollock's (1912–56) 'all-over' style. Cecil also met Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) at Dartington. When I asked him about this meeting, Cecil recalled it as being a bright sunny day when the poet walked with the artist under the trees without uttering a word. The forest was full of sounds and the earth and sky whispered the secret. It was a memorable day for Cecil. Dartington was founded by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst. Their work with Tagore resulted in Shantiniketan and Dartington sharing a similar ethos.

Just before he died in 1989, Cecil Collins finally achieved serious recognition from the establishment when he had a major retrospective exhibition at Tate, London. In September 2009 I jointly created a solo show of Cecil Collins's art at the Letherby Gallery, London. This centenary exhibition, with the title 'Fools and Angels', was an attempt to reflect his vision of what painting ought to be.

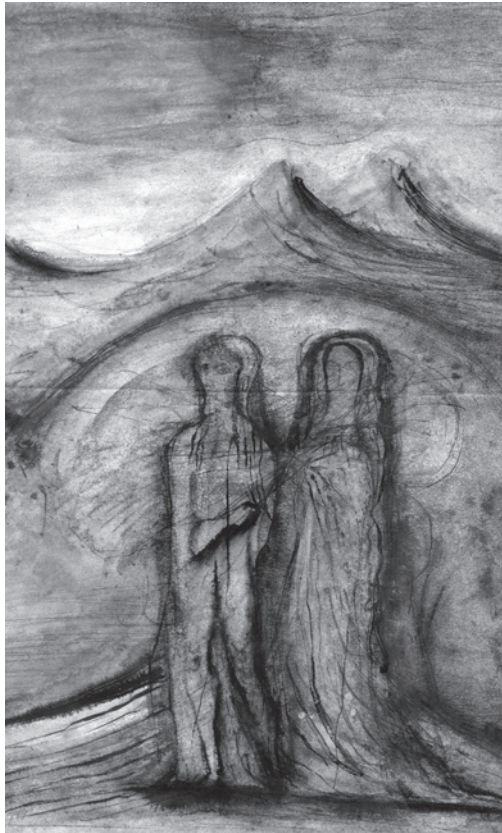
Art for Cecil Collins was not an end in itself, it had a function: that of transforming the world of matter by bringing into it other levels of consciousness. For him the angels, the fools, and the feminine—the three main themes of his work—were the instruments of that transformation. He talks about his paintings as 'objects of contemplation', and in this respect they belong to a universal reality. His vision was the vision of paradise, a paradise where angels and stars become the main protagonists in the creation of a perfect consciousness and gestalt of life. He further says, 'My own painting is essentially of the heart.' The saint, the artist, the poet, and the fool are one for him. 'They are the eternal virginity of spirit, which in the dark winter of the world continually proclaims the existence of

new life, giving the faithful promise of the spring of an invisible Kingdom, and the coming of light.’

Cecil maintained a deep inner life and sustained, against all the odds, a poetic and prophetic visionary approach to his work throughout his life. The lyrical and the poetic saturated his inspiring paintings, each work asserting the mystical vision of a grand universe, with men and women as parts of it. To his eyes, ‘light shining on a drop of rain glitters like diamonds and a thrush singing becomes the shape of the song.’<sup>4</sup> Rediscovering the world with precision and union with reality as affirmation

of the oneness of Creation was for Cecil essential to the development of the inner world. The longing for exquisite happiness juxtaposed against heart-breaking melancholy became the subject of his own personal and private vision. The wound beneath all beauty, the sublime imagination of the artist and the poet, and a deep longing for the innocence and purity of consciousness became for Cecil the driving forces behind his images.


Cecil’s works have a healing power; his vision offers a new beginning, a world where pain, suffering, and happiness mingle into a single state of being, a mind and life free of constraint. He questioned the relationship of humans with the Divine. He nurtured this relationship and said, ‘In my art and in my life, I feel a pilgrim’, and added, ‘Art is not talent; it is knowledge.’ ‘Beauty is a form of cognition,’ he always affirmed to us, his students; ‘what we contemplate, we become.’ To him the image offered by the artist is a bridge between the tangible



and the intangible. Those images, he said, are born out of the world of imagination, a world sometimes called the ‘unseen world’, essentially recognizable by its ambience. In that world the ego is not welcome, it must be left behind.

He talked of the contemporary definition of art and the role we, as painters and poets, are to assume: ‘The art of the future shall be to feed the interior life of individuals and will not be dominated by any theory; political, philosophical or religious. I believe there must be in the world a spiritual revolution NOW. A spiritual revolution is the movement of the human con-

sciousness from the ideas of fear and desire, victory and defeat, courage and cowardice, possessions—onto the idea of intelligence which is humility.’<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion I have to return to my own beliefs. The ‘spiritual’ is a mystical inner construction, the sense of tradition is a memory of spirit and I believe an eternally returning memory of the spiritual. 

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# Transcending the Metaphor

Swami Madhurananda

TO CONSIDER THAT THIS UNIVERSE IS the metaphor of God is a spiritual practice that follows basic tenets of Vedanta. Advaita Vedanta in particular as well as some scientists since the twentieth century maintain that God—or Consciousness—we, and this metaphorical universe are essentially same. Sri Ramakrishna still throws a unique light on these principles through his transcending metaphors. The following lines gradually unfold these concepts, discovering on the way the value of art in spiritual life.

## Contemporary Theory of Metaphor

Metaphor commonly means expressing one thing to intend another, making implicit comparisons between things linked by a common feature. The studies done in the field of metaphor during the last century are impressive indeed. Around 1980 George Lakoff, a linguist, and Mark Johnson, a philosopher, reviewed the studies done till then. They experimented with a number of metaphors deeply ingrained in our daily life to reach some interesting conclusions:

Metaphor is for most people device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.<sup>1</sup>

For these two researchers, previous theories ‘de-

rive from a naive realism that there is an objective world, independent of ourselves, to which words apply with fixed meanings. But they are conscious not to jump to the opposite and embrace a wholly subjectivist view that the personal, interior world is the only reality. Metaphors, for Lakoff and Johnson, are primarily matters of thought and action, only derivatively of language.’<sup>2</sup> Through their research the definition of metaphor is adjusted, and they conclude that ‘the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.’<sup>3</sup> They further express:

Many of our activities (arguing, solving problems, budgeting time, etc.) are metaphorical in nature. The metaphorical concepts that characterize those activities structure our present reality. New metaphors have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it. If a new metaphor enters the conceptual system that we base our actions on, it will alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to. ...

The idea that metaphor is just a matter of language and can at best only describe reality stems from the view that what is real is wholly external to, and independent of, how human beings conceptualize the world—as if the study of reality were just the study of the physical world. Such a view of reality—so-called objective reality—leaves out human aspects of reality, in particular the real perceptions, conceptualizations, motivations, and actions that constitute most of what we experience. But the human aspects of reality are most of what matters to us (145–6).

These concepts created such an impact that were amply considered in different areas of knowledge—

from science to philosophy, sociology, psychology, and many other fields. And since each field demands different languages and thought structures, these theories were incorporated fully, utilized fundamentally, or revised and reframed. Nonetheless, there seems to be general consent at present that human thought processes are largely metaphorical: 'the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor' (3).

As the purpose of this article is to apply metaphor theory to spirituality, metaphor deconstructions and controversies are not considered here. We rather bring out what matches in metaphor theory with authentic spiritual experiences recorded in relevant texts.

### Religious Metaphor

As religious language and thought is highly metaphorical, several thinkers have reached remarkable levels of understanding regarding the interaction between metaphor and truth. This subject has been widely discussed well before the two authors cited above. Reviewing a couple of them, who are somehow independent well-known thinkers, will take us few steps towards our purpose.

A thoughtful theologian in the English language is Sallie McFague, who considers that 'in a religious metaphor ... the two subjects, ordinary life and the transcendent, are so intertwined that there is no way of separating them out and, in fact, what we learn is not primarily something about God but a new way to live ordinary life'.<sup>4</sup> She further says:

Metaphor unites us and our world at a level below subject-object, mind-body; it is the nexus of 'man in the being of the world', the intimation of our original unity with all that is. To see connections, to unite this with that, is the distinctive nature of human thought; only human beings, it appears, can make novel connections within their familiar worlds in order to move beyond where they are (56).

What is at stake in this perspective is epistemologically radical; that is, it is *not* being pro-

posed that metaphorical language simply 'has a place' in human knowing, a place ultimately superseded by conceptual language. ... Rather metaphor, as Sewell understands it, is *the human method of investigating the universe*. And if the problem of human knowing ... is 'How does one investigate, interpret, inquire into a system of which the observer is an inseparable part?' then the answer must *include* the observer at every point; it must be a method in which 'one figures itself in on whatever figuring process one is at work upon' (59).

Quantum physics reached the same conclusion about the material world many years earlier, that 'the answer must *include* the observer at every point'. Therefore, McFague's theology, and almost all non-traditional theology of the twentieth century—a century in which scientific discoveries amply influenced the world's intellectuals—is still deeply grounded in the field of reason. Then, let us now situate ourselves at the border between meaningful twentieth-century reason and spiritual intuition by quoting one more thinker who was relatively close to the Ramakrishna tradition:

How, in the contemporary period, can we evoke the imagery that communicates the most profound and most richly developed sense of experiencing life? These images must point past themselves to that ultimate truth which must be told: that life does not have any one absolutely fixed meaning. These images must point past all meanings given, beyond all definitions and relationships, to that really ineffable mystery that is just the existence, the being of ourselves and of our world.

If we give that mystery an exact meaning we diminish the experience of its real depth. But when a poet carries the mind into a context of meanings and then pitches it past those, one knows that marvelous rapture that comes from going past all categories of definition. Here we sense the function of metaphor that allows us to make a journey we could not otherwise make, past all categories of definition.<sup>5</sup>

Is this true? Does a metaphor exist that allows us to pass 'all categories of definition'?

### **Beware of Maya!**

Before proceeding, one note of warning, especially for those too grounded in Indian, particularly Vedantic thought. In the metaphor that considers the universe as God's metaphor, the word 'metaphor' is not to be equated with the word 'maya'; otherwise, one loses the power of the metaphor and, even worse, one loses the opportunity to transcend it. 'Maya' is primarily a philosophical concept; however, we cannot transcend the world—the metaphor of the world—with philosophy alone. There needs to be a practical field that correlates with philosophy. When we attempt to live philosophical principles what we need is art—understanding art as the materialization in the physical world of abstractions related to the essence of existence. Art generally expresses itself through symbolic language, which can be visual, verbal, musical, spatial, or otherwise. As we have seen from the con-

temporary theory of metaphor, we are, by our very human constitution, naturally living philosophy through metaphors. And this experience occurs not only in our mind but in our daily actions as well.

There is a tendency in philosophy to try to associate a new concept with a previously known one. This occurs because a mind established in a particular system experiences confusion when faced with something that cannot be related. Associating something new with something known gives a kind of relief, sometimes even intellectual pleasure. However, if in a given frame of reference the new concept carries a value that is not identical with the known related concept, this association may prove to be an obstacle to any further progress towards improving a philosophical system or ascending to a higher level of consciousness, as would occur in the context we are discussing if metaphor is associated with maya. Moreover, to fully grasp any new concept demands a mental effort, and the tendency of the mind—of the *buddhi*, discerning faculty—is to automatically associate a new concept to a known one to thus reduce or avoid the effort that realizing a new concept requires. If the new concept is found to be right, it may demand an even greater effort: to restructure our entire way of life! The relentless fear of the mind towards challenge is known as fear of death in psychology and fear to lose one's ego in Vedanta. This idea can be better illustrated with a real 'transcending metaphor' used by Sri Ramakrishna. While Sri Ramakrishna was explaining the knowledge of Brahman to a devotee, the following discussion took place:

Master: 'A man attains Brahmajnana as soon as his mind is annihilated. With the annihilation of the mind dies the ego, which says 'I', 'I'. One also attains the Knowledge of Brahman by following the path of devotion. ... Each ego may be likened to a pot. Suppose there are ten pots filled with water, and the sun is reflected in them. How many suns do you see?'

A devotee: 'Ten reflections. Besides, there certainly exists the real sun.'

Master: 'Suppose you break one pot. How many suns do you see now?'



PHOTO: 'THE PART YOU LEFT BEHIND'. DIANA LEE ANGSTADT PHOTOGRAPHY

Devotee: 'Nine reflected suns. But there certainly exists the real sun.'

Master: 'All right. Suppose you break nine pots. How many suns do you see now?'

Devotee: 'One reflected sun. But there certainly exists the real sun.'

Master (to Girish): 'What remains when the last pot is broken?'

Girish: 'That real sun, sir.'

Master: 'No. What remains cannot be described. What *is* remains. How will you know there is a real sun unless there is a reflected sun?'<sup>6</sup>

Girish offers the typical answer that reflects the workings of our mind when confronted with such a metaphor. Reason reaches the logical conclusion of the metaphor—'that real sun'—which in this case represents Brahman. And here we stop, proud of having reached the correct and logical conclusion. There is no art in this thinking process or in its conclusions, there is only philosophy. Sri Ramakrishna breaks the automated tendency of the *buddhi* by artistically transcending the metaphor. He categorically negates what is believed to be the obvious conclusion, and at the same time he affirms the truth, which lies beyond reason. The powerful effect of this method to carry someone to higher levels of consciousness is simply extraordinary. It is a method that uses both philosophy and art. It is the method of the Upanishads, which, when accessed with art, with involvement, leave us at the door of Truth. Crossing the door is the last step.

Regarding the concept we are discussing—this whole Creation is the metaphor of God—if we allow our *buddhi* to associate metaphor with maya, we then lose the artistic aspect of the metaphor by keeping only its philosophical side. We thus render the opportunity of transcendence futile. 'The reason we have focused so much on metaphor is that it unites reason and imagination. Reason, at the very least, involves categorization, entailment, and inference. Imagination, in one of its many aspects, involves seeing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing—what we have called metaphorical thought. Metaphor is thus *imaginative rationality*.'<sup>7</sup>

In religious terms: 'The metaphorical languages of both mythology and metaphysics are not denotative of actual worlds or gods, but rather connote levels and entities within the person touched by them. Metaphors only seem to describe the outer world of time and place. Their real universe is the spiritual realm of the inner life. The Kingdom of God is within you.'<sup>8</sup>

We are not playing down here the value or usefulness of the concept of maya, which, probably, is one of the pinnacles the human mind has reached in philosophy. We are simply not bringing in our present discussion, for the reason mentioned above, something that is, as Acharya Shankara puts it, *anirvacanīya*, unutterable, indescribable. After all, from the relative standpoint, is not stating that this universe is all maya yet another metaphor?

### **We Appear as What We Perceive**

The stars, the earth, the light that illumines what you are seeing around yourself, the air you are breathing now, your eyes swinging through these lines, the thoughts you are producing while reading these lines, your ego witnessing those thoughts; and just a step behind you are close to the real 'you'. Try to perceive yourself watching your thoughts; try to hold yourself there.

There 'you' and 'I' are same. But the moment we stop being there, we reinsert ourselves in the metaphor of the universe by again bringing into our range time, space, and the rest. It is precisely by bringing in all these things that we go on producing the metaphor. Yes, you, I, all of us are creating this great metaphor of the universe. This 'we' in its totality is what is called God.

Each event, each sight, each feeling, each concrete or abstract entity in this universe points to a reality that lies behind—their intrinsic Reality. There is a consciousness manifesting itself in everything and at every instance of our existence; and if we are its manifestations, then that consciousness cannot be different from us. We create the great metaphor and seem to be *outside* it, at the same time we exist in the metaphor and seem to *be* it:

*Yathā prakāśayāmyeko dehamenaṁ tathā jagat;  
Ato mama jagatsarvamathavā na ca kiñcana.*

As I alone reveal this body, even so do I reveal this universe. Therefore, mine is all this universe, or verily nothing is mine.<sup>9</sup>

It is comparatively easier to perceive that we are unconsciously or consciously writing this metaphor of the universe, for instance, by seeing the shape of our hands, as it is our thoughts and actions that have shaped them. Without much difficulty we can sense the workings of a universal intelligence by becoming aware of our heart beating, and by extension we can sense our connection with every creature whose heart beats. But it may not be so easy to understand that we are also involved in the production of mountains, wind, and constellations. Our mind is bewildered by the intelligence that created the form, texture, and colour of the crown flower, the social organization of bees, and the force of gravity. But perceiving that intelligence behind a puddle in a street, a telephone bill, or a silly dream appears to be impossible. Nonetheless, if we pursue the analysis to its farthest reaches, we find that everything in the Creation is interrelated. The heat we individually and collectively generate changes the temperature of a region, which affects its atmospheric pressure; in turn, that change of pressure creates a current of air. We not only can contribute to create wind, we sometimes even determine the direction it blows!

*Yattvaṁ paśyasi tatraikastvameva pratibhāse.*

You alone appear as whatever you perceive (15.14).

The discoveries of science are showing more and more that everything in this Creation is interrelated. Scientists increasingly point to ‘something’—some even dare to call it consciousness—underlying all that exists. Centuries ago Samkhya and Vedanta cosmology had explained these same universal principles in detail. This interrelation makes us not only part of Creation but part of the creational pro-

cess as well. And if art is necessary for any creational process, then we also need art to follow the reverse process—to read ‘through’ Creation.

### **As if It Were Real**

Trying to perceive everything as different metaphors that express the Reality behind them, or intrinsic to them, and finally to perceive Creation as a single metaphor that passes ‘all categories of definitions’ is a spiritual practice that neither denies nor affirms Creation. This practice also does not ‘force’ a false identification with Reality while one is fully identified with the world:

*Ayaṁ so’hamayaṁ nāhaṁ vibhāgamiti santyaja;  
Sarvamātmēti niścītya niḥsaṅkalpaḥ sukṣi bhava.*

Completely give up such distinctions as ‘I am He’ and ‘I am not this’. Consider all as the Self and be desireless and happy (15.15).

Considering all as the Self is accepting that the universe and God—‘we’ in its totality—are one.

Then, how do we transcend the metaphor of the universe? It is the way we live ‘in’ the metaphor that determines our possibility of transcendence. Vedanta proposes to consider the universe ‘as if’ it were real, exactly in the same way we consider metaphors: ‘as if’ they were that which they represent, though knowing well they are just revealers of another reality. Finally, when we realize that the universe, God, and we are essentially same, the metaphor of the universe and what it represents become one. Those who have achieved transcendence tell us:


*Tāta cinmātrarūpo’si na te bhinnamidam jagat;  
Ataḥ kasya katham kutra heyopādeyakalpanā.*

My child, you are pure Consciousness itself. This universe is nothing different from you. Therefore, how and where can anyone have the idea of acceptance and rejection?<sup>10</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna expresses the same with another transcending metaphor he artistically shaped

to awaken sublime devotion in Narendranath—Swami Vivekananda—a young future monk with a strong intellectual bent of mind:

I said to Narendra: 'Look here, my boy. God is the Ocean of Bliss. Don't you want to plunge into this Ocean? Suppose there is a cup of syrup and you are a fly. Where will you sit to sip the syrup?' Narendra said, 'I will sit on the edge of the cup and stick my head out to drink it.' 'Why?' said I. 'Why should you sit on the edge?' He replied, 'If I go far into the syrup, I shall be drowned and lose my life.' Then I said to him: 'But, my child, there is no such fear in the Ocean of Satchidananda. It is the Ocean of Immortality. By plunging into It a man does not die; he becomes immortal.'<sup>11</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna creates a metaphor and then transcends it, leaving the mind, or the heart, of the disciple at the threshold between the metaphor and Reality. He shows us that the metaphor is not real in itself, but he also makes us understand that we need the metaphor, as it is only through it that we reach transcendence: 'What *is* remains. How will you know there is a real sun unless there is a reflected sun?' 

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# Mysticism and Mystic Visions

Swami Prabhavananda

LET US FIRST TRY TO UNDERSTAND what is meant by mysticism. A mystic has the firm conviction that God or the ultimate Reality or Brahman—whatever name you give it—can be experienced in this very life, and that Brahman is the indwelling Self within each one of us. It is when that vision opens up that we become true mystics and then see that this whole universe is filled with the presence of Brahman. There is the same Self, I—the true I, the Being that I am—dwelling within everyone in the universe. There is no distinction between man and man, man and woman, race and race, nation and nation. My own Self, my own Being, the same Reality, dwells, exists, everywhere in the universe.

## The Highest Goal

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, ‘religion is the manifestation of divinity already existing in man.’ We see that divinity everywhere. And in the words of the Greek mystic Plotinus, ‘I shall restore the Divine in me to the Divine that is all’. This is the purpose and the one supreme goal of every human life. Our human life will be wasted if we fail to realize that Truth in this very existence. That—the highest goal—must be the one goal.

Swamiji said:

We must even have the highest ideal. Unfortunately in this life, the vast majority of persons are groping through this dark life without any ideal at all. If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal. And this ideal we must hear about

as much as we can, till it enters into our hearts, into our brains, into our very veins, until it tingles in every drop of our blood and permeates every pore in our body. We must meditate upon it. ‘Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh,’ and out of the fullness of the heart the hand works too.

It is thought which is the propelling force in us. Fill the mind with the highest thoughts, hear them day after day, think them month after month. Never mind failures; they are quite natural, they are the beauty of life, these failures. What would life be without them? It would not be worth having if it were not for the struggles. Where would be the poetry of life? Never mind the struggles, the mistakes. I never heard a cow tell a lie, but it is only a cow—never a man. ... Hold the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.

Of course, everyone has some goal in life. A person wants to become a politician, another a lawyer, a doctor, or something else. I do not object to such things. We need politicians, lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. But they must learn to spiritualize their lives and move toward the supreme goal: to experience God within themselves.

Why is there such chaos in this world? Why is there violence and youth rebellion? Because we have forgotten the ideal! That ideal is not even taught in churches. Yes, there are scriptures, there are gospels, the truth, the revealed words of God—but what good are they if there is no living example of those truths? Until you have that experience for yourself, ‘you have not yet drunk of that fountain which makes “reason unreason, mortal immortal, this world a zero, and of man a God”’ in the words of Vivekananda.

To quote Shankara: ‘Those who echo borrowed teachings are not free from the world. But those

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The text of this article forms part of the author’s new book *Realizing God*, edited by Ms Edith Tipple.

who have attained samadhi by merging the external universe, the sense organs, the mind, and the ego in the pure consciousness of the Atman—they alone are free from the world, with its bonds and snares.’ Why should I have to see God and realize him? What is the effect? The effect is this: the knot of ignorance in the heart becomes loosened, all doubts cease to exist, all the effects of past, present, and future deeds are wiped out.

In the Upanishads it is called *turiya*, the fourth—transcending the waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep states. Is it then that we just know God as I know you? In fact, I do not know you; I do not know anything at all. I only read what my senses carry to my mind. Immanuel Kant pointed out that the-thing-in-itself remains unknown and unknowable, whereas the seers point out that It is more than known and knowable: it is being and becoming, the untying of the three knots of knowledge—subject, object, and the process of knowledge. The knot of distinction between subject and object has to be untied to reach unitary consciousness.

How is it possible? When the heart is purified there is constant recollectedness of God. Now reverse the process: practise thinking of God, hearing about the ideal, until it gets into your blood, as it were. And then naturally the heart becomes purified. My master [Swami Brahmananda] used to say again and again: ‘Practice, practice, practice.’ There is a line in Sanskrit: ‘Adopt any means by which you can keep your mind in the Lord.’ That is the secret.

When we realize the supreme Truth, can we express what it is? Has anybody been able to express that? Sri Ramakrishna used to say that even the scriptures have been defiled because they have been uttered by the lips of man. But the ultimate truth of God has never been uttered by the lips of man. It is not possible. That is why you find in the same scripture one seer says something, another seer says something else—because they are relative expressions of the same.

Though it is not communicable, Truth can be transmitted. Not by words, but I have known how my master, with a touch, could transmit that

power. A mystic can describe some of these experiences, and they are true spiritual experiences and visions, but they are not the supreme Truth. If we stop and do not move onward, we miss the ultimate Reality. That often happens: mystics having some visions or experiences think they have seen God, have realized the ultimate Reality, and they do not study anymore. But my master told me this truth: ‘Light, more light, more light, more light! Is there any end to it?’

### ***Psychic Experiences against Spiritual Experiences***

Let me point out the difference between hallucinations, delirium, and spiritual visions. There is a saying in the Bible: ‘for the tree is known by his fruit.’ Hallucinations weaken the brain, and the character is not transformed. Delirium is from a diseased brain. But when spiritual visions come, the effect is a stamp on the character; it is transformed. Love, compassion, sympathy, devotion arise in the heart—as does self-control.

I have often heard that mysticism is escapism, but suppose the house is on fire. Won’t you try to escape? This is the escape from suffering and misery to reach that domain where there is no night but only light and bliss.

Psychologically speaking, a human being is Spirit encased in sheathes: physical, subtle, and causal. Therefore, each one of us is essentially a spiritual being, because our true nature is the indwelling God. Just as we consist of sheathes, similarly Brahman is encased in sheathes—physical, subtle, and causal. A seer experiences this physical universe as Brahman everywhere. When you see clay dolls of many different kinds and forms, you know it is all clay, only the names and forms are different.

There is another kind of experience brought out in the Mundaka Upanishad: ‘Heaven is his head, the sun and moon his eyes, the four quarters his ears, the revealed scriptures his voice, the air his breath.’ Try to feel that you are breathing the breath of God. ‘The universe his heart, from his feet came the earth. He is the innermost Self of all.’

Now again, we experience the physical universe with our ordinary five senses—hearing, touch, smell, taste, sight. Similarly, when we rise to the psychic plane, there is sound, smell, sight, and so on. You can hear a sound, taste something, see some light. Not only that, powers may come to you—for instance, clairvoyance or clairsaudience, or reading the thoughts of others. Patanjali says: ‘The psychic powers may be obtained either by birth, or by means of drugs, or by power of words, or by the practice of austerities, or by concentration.’ Drugs can give psychic power or vision momentarily, but the effect, if continued, is that the brain becomes completely deranged. Beware!

A spiritual aspirant tries to avoid psychic powers. My master taught me that even if you are not seeking psychic powers, if you are simply meditating and counting your beads and trying to pray to God for love, devotion, and knowledge, you may suddenly feel a power in you. Try to test its validity once, but never try a second time. If you do not try anymore, you lose that power.

Patanjali also points out that these are powers in the worldly sense, but obstacles on the spiritual path. They are temptations. Do not trust anyone who shows such occult powers. Both Patanjali and Swami Vivekananda point out that the spiritual progress of those who show such powers is completely blocked.

In some spiritual aspirants visions may come—but not in all. If they do not, it does not mean there is no growth. The main thing is character: love, devotion, purity. These are the things we have to achieve.

### **Direct Experience**

There is a kind of vision called lower samadhi, in which you have the vision of what I may call a personal God, formless or with form. Of course, great joy and bliss come, but there is still a feeling of separation, because you are having the vision and experience. Do not stop there. The highest, what we call *nirvikalpa* samadhi, unitary consciousness, we must struggle and struggle for until we realize: ‘I am

Brahman. I am He. Everything that I see before me is my own Self, is the one Lord in so many forms.’ Just consider! If only a few of you realize that, you can bring a complete change in the whole world!

The knowledge gained from inference and study of scriptures is knowledge of one kind; the knowledge which is gained from samadhi or transcendental experience is of a much higher order; it goes beyond inference and scriptures.

Thus, we find that our five senses give us the experience of this world—we cannot deny these experiences as long as we are experiencing them—and also we gather certain data out of which we can come to an inference, and this is called inferential or empirical or scientific knowledge. It is also true.

There are philosophers in the West who try to prove the existence of God through inferential knowledge, and there are others who, through reason, can disprove the existence of God. The point is: Suppose we prove the existence of God. What does it mean? What have we proved? For instance, Hegel proved through his dialectic process the existence of an absolute reality, but he proved only an idea of the Absolute. Is there any guarantee that his idea of the Absolute and the Absolute itself are identical? In other words, until you have directly experienced that Absolute, it does not mean anything.

Now take the revealed scriptures. We come to some understanding because they are experiences of great sages and seers, and so we believe in the existence of God. Does that give us any satisfaction? It is just like somebody being sick and another taking medicine for him. Scriptural knowledge gives us no ultimate satisfaction because the absolute Truth is indefinable and inexpressible. It is a matter of experience. You have to reach a stage of unfoldment when, it is said, ‘scriptures are no longer scriptures, the Vedas become no Vedas’. How bold is this statement! To quote Swami Vivekananda: ‘Realization is real religion, all the rest is only preparation—hearing lectures, or reading books, or reasoning is merely preparing the ground; it is not religion. Intellectual assent and intellectual dissent are not religion.’

In the presence of my master, who was filled with God, you didn't have to ask whether God is or is not. You could feel the presence tangibly. Not only that, he would make us feel that God is so near that he is just like a fruit in the palm of our hand. And he would always insist that as others have realized their union with God, it is also possible for you.

In the Mahabharata King Yudhisthira was asked: 'What is the greatest wonder in the world?' He replied: 'The greatest wonder is that we see people dying, but still we do not believe we shall die.' We think that we shall live forever, because there is eternal life. But we seek that eternal life in this surface life of the body.

Concentration, meditation, and absorption are the direct means to realization. Shankara puts it a little differently. He says: 'Faith, devotion, and constant union with God through prayer—these are declared by sacred scriptures to be the seeker's direct means of liberation. To him who abides by them comes liberation from the bondage of physical consciousness, which has been forged by ignorance.'

Faith is having faith in the words of the guru and the scriptures—what we call *shraddha*. We must have faith that what the scriptures say is true, that God can be attained. And faith in the guru, who has attained realization and says: 'Yes, it is possible for you, for everyone, to realize That.' And then also to have a confidence in yourself that, yes, I can realize God. This is the first thing.

### Nirvikalpa Samadhi

There are seven centres of spiritual consciousness. Generally the minds of all people dwell within the three lower centres—the anus, the sex organ, and the navel. The mind begins to dwell in the fourth centre, in the heart, when you begin to meditate upon God. Then, love grows in your heart. During that time you may see a light or something. When the mind goes to the next higher centre, in the throat, you have become purified. When the mind goes there you cannot bear, at least for some time,

to talk or think of anything but God. If somebody talks about other things, it jars you.

Then when the mind comes to the centre between the eyebrows, you enter into samadhi. There you see either God with form or God without form, and you enjoy such bliss, such happiness, as you have never felt in your life. That is known as lower samadhi. When the mind comes to the thousand-petalled lotus, in the centre of the brain, there is what is known as *nirvikalpa* samadhi, union with Brahman. In the lower samadhi, *savikalpa*, though you see Reality, there is still a distinction between you and God. You are, as it were, a part of God; you are experiencing God. But when you go to the very highest, the ego is wiped out completely. As Patanjali points out: 'When the impression made by that samadhi is also wiped out, so that there are no more thought-waves at all in the mind, then one enters the samadhi which is called "seedless".' That is *nirvikalpa*.

In this connection let me quote to you Sri Ramakrishna's experience. He first had the experience of the Divine Mother in *savikalpa* samadhi. He said: 'Every time I gathered my mind together, I came face to face with the blissful form of the Divine Mother. However much I tried to free my mind from the consciousness of Mother, I did not have the will to go beyond. But at last, collecting all the strength of my will, I cut Mother's form to pieces with the sword of discrimination, and at once my mind became seedless and I reached *nirvikalpa* samadhi. It was beyond all expression.'

Philosophically, it is called *triputi bheda*, the untying of the three knots of knowledge—subject, object, and the process of knowledge. You see, in all our knowledge there is 'I', ego, experiencing something, and there is the process of knowledge. But when these three knots are untied, there is the unitary consciousness in which the consciousness of subject and object is dissolved away. Then, infinite, unitary consciousness alone remains. And finally, one knows the bliss of *nirvana* while still living on earth.

(To be concluded)

# Vedanta-sara

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

## 68. Anusandhānātmikāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛttiḥ cittam.

*Memory (citta) is that modification of the inner organ which remembers.*

**C**ITTA IS THE PEACEFUL DEEP MIND in which saṃskaras, impressions, remain; from there memory arises.

## 69. Abhimānātmikāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛttiḥ ahaṅkāraḥ.

*Egoism (ahaṅkāra) is that modification of the inner organ which is characterized by self-consciousness.*

Egoism gives the sense of me and mine. There is a manifestation of knowledge and the self-consciousness of *sattva guṇa* in it. All these modifications together form your subtle body. Know this and surrender.

The gross, subtle, and causal bodies as well as Brahman beyond them have been described. For convenience in spiritual practice, these have been further divided into five *kośas*, sheaths, and it is shown that the Reality, Brahman, God—and not ‘I’—is behind each of these entities. Each of these phases of personality is a cover for God, as it were. He alone, through his *māyā-śakti*, is sporting as these five *kośas*. Surrender to him with this knowledge.

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The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda’s classes on *Vedanta-sara*, conducted between 8 December 1954 and 20 January 1955. The notes—taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur—have been edited and reconstructed by Swami Brahmeshananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh.

To begin with, the *viññānamaya kośa*, is being described.

## 70. Ete punar-ākāśādi-gata-sāttvikāṁśebhyo militebhya utpadyante.

*These, be it noted, are produced from the combination of the sattva particles of ākāśa and the rest.*

## 71. Eteṣāṁ prakāśātmakatvāt-sāttvikāṁśa-kāryatvam.

*On account of their being luminous, they are said to be the products of sattva particles.*

## 72. Iyaṁ buddhir-jñānendriyaiḥ sahitā viññānamaya-kośo bhavati.

*This intellect, together with the organs of perception, constitutes the sheath of intelligence, viññānamaya kośa.*

We have a definite subject-object consciousness: ‘I am so and so’, ‘he is my father’, and so on. Initially, sensations come in through the organs of perception; this is followed by knowledge in a definite form, such as ‘he is my father’. This occurs due to the *buddhi*, intellect. Therefore, it is said that the intellect and the organs of perception together constitute the *viññānamaya kośa*. For the spiritual aspirant it is important to note that this is the main personality, the jiva, and that intellect is all important.

## 73. Ayaṁ kartṛtva-bhokṛtva-sukhitva-duḥkhitvādy-abhimānatveneha-loka-para-loka-gāmi vyavahāriko jīva ity-ucyate.

*This vijñānamaya kośa, on account of its being conscious that it is an agent and enjoyer, that it is happy or miserable, and so on, is called the phenomenal jiva—the individual self—subject to transmigration to this and the other worlds.*

This personality with its definite subject-object consciousness—‘I am happy’, ‘I am miserable’, ‘I am the doer’, ‘I am the enjoyer’, and so on—and the Reality behind constitute the jiva. This jiva associated with the *vijñānamaya kośa* transmigrates. At the time of death vibrations arise from this intellectual sheath and the jiva migrates, in accordance with its karma, to higher spheres like *satya-loka*, or to lower bodies such as that of a dog or a donkey. In every creature there is this *vijñānamaya kośa*, and behind it is God. This illumination will make you surrender at the feet of God, making your spiritual life an ideal one.

**74. Manas-tu jñānendriyaiḥ sahitam  
san-manomaya-kośo bhavati.**

*The mind together with the organs of perception constitutes the mental sheath, manomaya kośa.*

Sadananda now shows us the second phase of our inner life. The natural sequel of definitive knowledge in the *vijñānamaya kośa* is that you start thinking about the object. Thus, thinking is always preceded by definite subject-object knowledge. If this subject-object knowledge is pure, if the conviction about the object in the *buddhi* is pure, then the thinking also will be pure, on the same lines. If, for example, you intellectually consider an object as a means of enjoyment, your mind will also think in that line. But if your outlook towards the objects of the world is transcendental—that is, if you consider them divine—then the vibrations in your mind too will be divine. Our whole life, our thoughts and actions, depends upon the *vijñānamaya kośa*. Therefore, this *kośa*—that is, the organs of knowledge and the intellect—must be purified and trained.

**75. Karmendriyāṇi  
vāk-pāṇi-pāda-pāyūpasthākhyāni.**

*The organs of action include the organs of speech, the hands, the feet, and the organs of evacuation and generation.*

**76. Etāni punar-ākāśādīnām rajo’rṁsebhyo  
vyastebhyaḥ pṛthak pṛthak  
krameṇotpadyante.**

*These are produced separately in consecutive order from the active rajas aspects of ākāśa and other elements.*

Although there is *sattva* and *tamas* in the organs of action, *rajas* is predominant. It is for this reason that the organs of action are dynamic, always active. There is more of *sattva* in the mind and intellect. The more you think and engage in intellectual activity, the more will *sattva* manifest in you. Similarly, the dynamism of the organs of action goes on increasing once you make them active by encouraging them to work. Once they become dynamic, it is difficult to check them. Activity goes on increasing, gets intensified. Remember this and be cautious.

**77. Vāyavaḥ prāṇāpāna-  
vyānodāna-samānāḥ.**

*The five vital forces are the following: prāṇa, apāna, vyāna, udāna, and samāna.*

The organs of action were first described because the *prāṇamaya kośa*, vital sheath, is to be described next. If there is a problem at the level of the sheath of intelligence, the mind is disturbed. This leads to irregularity in the organs of action, and finally respiration, *prāṇa*, gets disturbed. All the various aspects of the vital breath—*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, and *samāna*—get disturbed.

You must also remember that God is present behind all these aspects. Therefore, change your outlook towards the world and the mental sheath and all other facets of the personality will reach a balance. The rishis started with the *vijñānamaya kośa*. If you try to control the organs of senses and action through physical or mechanical means, you will fail. If there is an evil outlook at the level of the *vijñānamaya kośa*, it will lead to evil thinking

at the level of the mind. So, if you think you will be able to control the hands working out this evil, you are mistaken; for *rajas* predominates at the level of the *karmendriyas*. Hence, if you want to lead a noble life, rectify your outlook at the level of the *vijñānamaya kośa*.

**78. Prāṇo nāma prāg-gamanavān-nāsāgra-sthānavartī.**

*Prāṇa is that vital force which goes upward and has its seat at the tip of the nose.*

**79. Apāno nāmāvāg-gamanavān-pāyvādi-sthānavartī.**

*Apāna is that vital force which goes downward and has its seat in the organs of excretion and the adjacent areas.*

**80. Vyāno nāma viśvag-gamanavān-akhila-śarīravartī.**

*Vyāna is that vital force which moves in all directions and pervades the entire body.*

**81. Udāno nāma kaṇṭha-sthāniya ūrdhva-gamanavān-utkramaṇa-vāyuh.**

*Udāna is the ascending vital force which helps the passing out (of the jiva) from the body and has its seat in the throat.*

**82. Samāno nāma śarīra-madhyagatāśita-pītānnādi-samikaraṇakaraḥ.**

*Samāna is that vital force which assimilates food and drink and has its seat in the middle of the body.*

**83. Samikaraṇan-tu paripāka-karaṇam-rasā-rudhira-śukra-puṣṭi-śādi-karaṇam-iti yāvat.**

*Assimilation means digestion of food and its conversion into chyle, blood, semen, faeces, and other materials in the body.*

**84. Kecit-tu nāga-kūrma-kṛkala-devadatta-dhanañjayākhyāḥ pañcānye vāyavaḥ santīti vadanti.**

*Others say that there are five more vital forces*

*known as nāga, kūrma, kṛkala, devadatta, and dhanañjaya.*

**85. Tatra nāga udgiraṇakaraḥ. Kūrma unmīlanakaraḥ. Kṛkalaḥ kṣutkaraḥ. Devadatto jṛmbhaṇakaraḥ. Dhanañjayaḥ poṣaṇakaraḥ.**

*Of these nāga is that which causes vomiting or eructation, kūrma opens the eyelids, kṛkala creates hunger, devadatta produces yawning, and dhanañjaya nourishes the body.*

**86. Eteṣāṃ prāṇādiṣvantarbhāvāt-prāṇādayaḥ pañcaiveti kecit.**

*Some say that on account of their being included in prāṇa and other forces, the vital forces are really five in number.*

**87. Etat-prāṇādi-pañcakam-ākāśādi-gata-rajo'mśebhyo-militebhya utpadyate.**

*These five vital forces, namely prāṇa and others, are produced from the combination of the active rajas aspects of ākāśa and other elements.*

**88. Idaṃ prāṇādi-pañcakam karmendriyaiḥ sahitam sat-prāṇamaya-kośo bhavati. Asya kriyātmakatvena rajo'mśa-kāryatvam.**

*These five vital forces, prāṇa and others, together with the organs of action constitute the vital sheath, prāṇamaya kośa. Its active nature shows that it is the product of rajas.*

(To be continued)

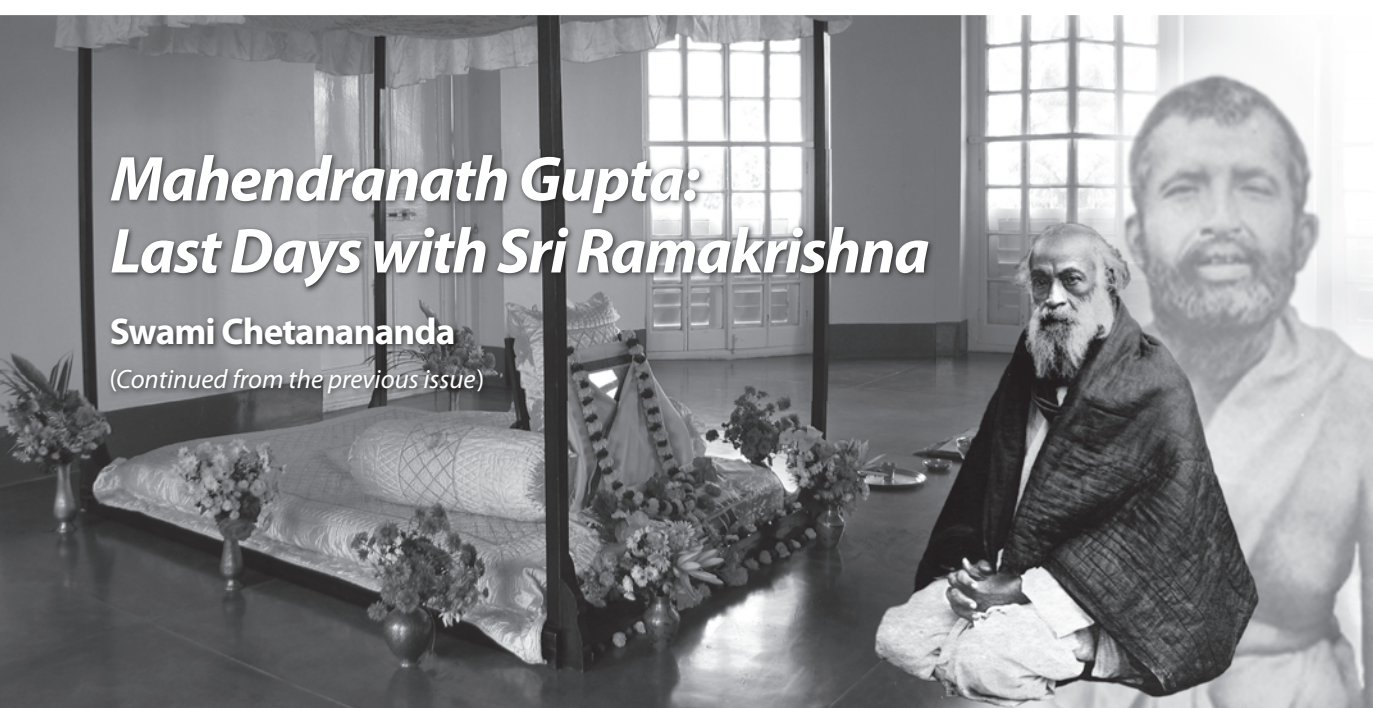
**I**f we observe closely the changeableness of things outside as well as within, we can be convinced of the unreality of the entire world. Every change perceived by the senses as happening outside has its counterpart within us. In proportion as the outer world is changeable, so is the inner world. By the reality of a thing is meant truly its existence at all times, eternally.

—Swami Shivananda,  
A Man of God, 70

# Mahendranath Gupta: Last Days with Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Chetanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)



**SUNDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 1885** • At 6.00 a.m. M arrived and found the Master asleep. He and Shashi went to visit Dr Sarkar. Shashi gave the doctor details about Sri Ramakrishna's condition. Dr Sarkar then said: 'If this is true, then he will die.' The statement shocked both M and Shashi. Shashi begged Dr Sarkar: 'The Master is suffering from excruciating pain. Please give him some effective medicine.' After saying this, Shashi left the room. He had brought a sample of the Master's blood to show the doctor. The doctor then spoke frankly to M: 'It seems that it is cancer.' This was the first time that the doctor had openly declared Sri Ramakrishna's disease to be cancer. M was extremely upset. He said plaintively: 'Sir, you must assure us that his suffering can be mitigated. Is there anything lacking in his care?' 'The nursing is going well,' Dr Sarkar replied, 'but his suffering will increase day by day. You can go now.'

M left the doctor's residence. After walking for a while, he sat down on a bench in Wellington Square—now Subodh Mallick Square—and began to weep. He lamented: 'O beloved Master, how shall I live without you?' Returning home, he told his wife everything and then went back to the Shyampukur house. The Master was feeling a little better. M went to Vidyasagar's school—at 100

Shyampukur Street—and read the notes that he had written on the Master's life in Kamarpukur.

At 5.00 p.m. M returned to the Master and found him in great pain. He was restless. He told Surendra: 'I have never felt such pain before.' M was very sad and felt helpless when he heard this. Soon Dr Sarkar arrived.

Master: 'It is very painful. Please give me some medicine.' The doctor examined Sri Ramakrishna's throat and gave him some medicine. The Master then went into samadhi. After a while he told Dr Sarkar: 'I tried to suppress my ecstasy, but failed. My mind merged into the Infinite. Nowadays I don't see any forms anymore.' His face was shining with bliss.

**Monday, 30 November 1885** • The day had been uneventful. In the evening the Master was sitting up, surrounded by Narendra and other devotees. He said: 'I see that everything is maya. This body is like a sheath. God is in everything and He has become everything.' He was silent for a while, and then he said to Narendra: 'I hesitate to give up this body lest you boys be submerged in grief.' As they witnessed the Master's suffering, the devotees decided to begin Ayurvedic treatment. Someone went to Dr Navin Pal, who arrived at 10.00 p.m. He gave Ayurvedic medicine to the Master and asked

him to gargle with hot water. But the Master said: 'No gargling—it hurts too much.'

**Tuesday, 1 December 1885** • M arrived at 2.00 p.m. from Vidyasagar's school. The Master told M that he had been coughing the night before and needed medication. Sharat went to Dr Sarkar and Dr Pal.

The Master was impatient. He said: 'Navin [Pal] has not yet come. What kind of person is he? I am depending on him.' M was ready to fetch the doctor, but the Master stopped him.

**Wednesday, 2 December 1885** • M arrived at 12.30 p.m. and collected information on the Master's health for the doctors. Sri Ramakrishna had been having difficulty swallowing food, and he was coughing and felt dizzy. M left to deliver his reports and returned at 5.30 p.m.

The Master may have been thinking about returning to Dakshineswar because he sent Rakhal to see Trailokyanath Biswas, Mathur's son and the caretaker of the Dakshineswar temple. However, the gatekeeper would not allow him to see Trailokya. Rakhal sent his message to him through someone else.

When Dr Sarkar arrived, he asked about the Master's health in detail. As a man of science, he had a low opinion of Ayurvedic medicine. Nonetheless, Dr Sarkar and Dr Pal both continued to treat the Master. For the next two days the Master was tolerably well.

Narendra said to the Master: 'Let us go back to Dakshineswar. Mother Kali dwells there.' 'Is not Kali here?' replied the Master.

**Saturday, 5 December 1885** • On his way to work, M came to see the Master and found him sleeping. He heard that the previous night Sri Ramakrishna's condition had been critical. He was shivering so much that even the quilt was not effective. His attendants were anxious and called Dr Biharilal Bhaduri. Seeing Shashi and Rakhal weeping, the Master said: 'Don't cry. Does the body last forever?'

M had urgent business at Vidyasagar's school, so he wrote his report on the Master's health and

sent it to Dr Sarkar through another devotee. M returned at 12.30 p.m. and found Girish and some others in the Master's room. Dr Sarkar arrived shortly thereafter and learned that the Master was eating rice gruel and bathing daily. He did not approve of this. He then said that the air pollution in the Shyampukur area was terrible. The smog was most heavy in the mornings and evenings when people used their coal stoves. He suggested that the Master be moved to a garden-house on the outskirts of Calcutta.

Narendra fed the Master. Dr Sarkar observed that he was having difficulty swallowing even a liquid diet. When the doctor left, Ramchandra told Sri Ramakrishna: 'Sir, Dr Sarkar has suggested that we find a garden-house outside Calcutta. Shall we look for it now?'

The Master consented: 'Yes, find a place. Here I have no good digestion or appetite.' Ramchandra and the devotees began to search for a suitable place for the Master.

**Sunday, 6 December 1885** • Dr Sarkar prescribed broth, which gave Sri Ramakrishna some strength. The attendants and devotees were, for the time being, relieved. M arrived at 8.00 a.m. and found the Master slowly walking around his room. He said that the meat soup was giving him some strength. The soup had been made from a goat that had been sacrificed in front of the Kali image.

Ramchandra Datta went to Trailokya to ask for a room in the Kuthi at Dakshineswar for Sri Ramakrishna, but Trailokya would not provide one. When Ramchandra returned, he told the Master: 'Trailokya refused. Shall we look for another place?' Master: 'Yes, find another place. I have no appetite here.' M said to Ram: 'Please go today.'

Dr Sarkar arrived at noon. He asked Narendra and others to sing some songs in an adjacent room. When Narendra began singing, the Master came into the room and joined the group. M sang a song by Mirabai. The Master returned to his room when the singing was over.

**Monday, 7 December 1885** • M was on his way

to see the Master early in the morning when he encountered Narendra on the street. They walked to the Shyampukur house together. When the Master saw them, he said: 'I had a thick haemorrhage last night and now I have a throbbing pain.' Captain Upadhyay arrived. The Master talked to him briefly and then washed his mouth. He cautioned his attendants that the rinse water should be disposed of hygienically. Narendra assured him that it would be.

The Master asked for a mirror. He then turned it around like a child and saw his emaciated body in it.

Master: 'What next?'

M: 'Sir, your disease has taken a good turn and you will be cured.'

Master: 'What do you say?'

Narendra: 'You are getting well.'

Master: 'Is that so?'

M: 'Yes, sir. Dr Sarkar says that you are improving because you no longer bathe or eat rice gruel.'

These remarks reassured the Master.

**Tuesday, 8 December 1885** • M arrived at 5.00 p.m. and learned that Sri Ramakrishna had coughed throughout the night and had a throbbing pain. Despite Dr Sarkar's diagnosis, M still believed that the Master's disease was clergyman's sore throat. He told the Master: 'I believe that you have got the right medicine and your disease will be cured. No one has ever talked as much as you, and your singing is unparalleled.'

Sri Ramakrishna smiled. He then got up and began to walk slowly in his room. Suddenly he began throwing up blood. His attendants and devotees were alarmed. Narendra and Ramchandra rushed to the room. M could not bear the Master's suffering, so he left the room. But soon after he came back and noticed that the Master had rallied. 'Why does this happen?' the Master asked Narendra. 'Perhaps the sore is drying up because I have not had a bath.' Ramchandra said to the attendants: 'Please do what the Master says now.' M went home that night and sent his maidservant to clean the Shyampukur house.

**Wednesday, 9 December 1885** • The Master was feeling better. M came by in the morning and then left to see Dr Sarkar and Dr Kali Kaviraj, another Ayurvedic practitioner. Later M returned to the Master and informed him of the doctors' suggestions.

Mahimacharan Chakrabarty found a garden-house at 90 Kashipur Road in Kashipur for the Master. When Dr Sarkar heard about the location of the garden-house, he approved. The Master said to M: 'Now make arrangements to move.'

**Thursday, 10 December 1885** • The Master appeared to be improving. M arrived in the evening. The devotees told Sri Ramakrishna that the Kashipur house would cost eighty rupees per month. Immediately the Master said: 'I don't need such an expensive place. Let whatever is in my fate happen. It is better that I go back to Dakshineswar.' After a long discussion the devotees persuaded Sri Ramakrishna to agree to the move. Surendra promised to pay the rent and signed a six-month lease. The last night at Shyampukur passed smoothly. M stayed at night.

**Friday, 11 December 1885** • At 5.00 a.m. M took over the nursing duty from Shashi. While returning from the bathroom, the Master asked M: 'What does the doctor say? Is it cancer?' Avoiding the question, M said: 'Sir, it is cold here. Let us go inside the room.' M left at 6.30 a.m. After running several errands, he returned at 2.15 p.m.

Shashi told M that Dr Sarkar had arrived to see the Master.

Dr Sarkar: 'Now you are better. Please go to Kashipur and get well.'

Master: 'Will you visit me there? I know it is a little far.'

Dr Sarkar: 'I want a report on your health every day, and I shall visit you occasionally.'

In the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna left for Kashipur by horse carriage with Holy Mother, Latu, Kali, and Senior Gopal. Other attendants took another carriage with the household belongings and necessities. Sri Ramakrishna had lived at the Shyampukur house for seventy days.

### At the Kashipur Garden-house

On 11 December at 10.00 p.m. M and Girish arrived at the garden-house in Kashipur by horse carriage. They entered the Master's room on the upper floor. A lantern was lit. There were many mosquitoes, so the Master was lying on his bed under the mosquito curtain. His bed consisted of a mat on the cement floor with a cotton carpet over it, and over that a mattress and sheet. His bed was situated in the southwest corner of the room, two yards from the western window.

Sri Ramakrishna was awake. Girish and M bowed down to him. He sat up and said: 'I have no cough or wheezing sound in my chest, but my stomach is not normal. The Ayurvedic doctor lives in Baghbazar. Will he be able to come here?' M replied: 'Of course, he will come soon. He will take a carriage.' Shortly after this Girish and M left for Calcutta.

At this time Dr Rajendralal Datta, a famous homeopathic doctor, began to treat the Master with Dr Sarkar's approval. He prescribed *Lycopodium* 200, and this kept the Master well for about two weeks.

**Sunday, 13 December 1885** • The news spread that Sri Ramakrishna had been moved to Kashipur. It was a holiday, so many devotees came there. At 2.00 p.m. M arrived and bowed down to the Master, who was seated facing north. His body was thin, but he was cheerful. M was suffering from blood dysentery. When Sri Ramakrishna heard that M was ill, he asked him to get some medicine from Ramlal. The Master assured him that within three days he would be cured. M took his leave at 4.30 p.m.

**Wednesday, 23 December 1885** • M arrived in the evening. The Master asked M to buy a stool for him.

Master: 'Well, can you tell how long it will take me to recover from this illness?'

M: 'It has been aggravated a little and will take some days.'

Master: 'How long?'

M: 'Perhaps five or six months.' ...

[Master:] 'So long? What do you mean?'

M: 'I mean, sir, for complete recovery.'

Master: 'Oh, that! I am relieved. Can you explain one thing? How is it that in spite of all these visions, all this ecstasy and samadhi, I am so ill?'

M: 'Your suffering is no doubt great; but it has a deep meaning.'

Master: 'What is it?'

M: 'A change is coming over your mind. It is being directed towards the formless aspect of God. Even your "ego of Knowledge" is vanishing.'

Master: 'That is true. My teaching of others is coming to an end. I see that everything is Rama Himself. ... This illness is showing who belong to the inner circle and who to the outer. ... Those who pay occasional visits and ask, "How are you, sir?" belong to the outer circle.' ...

(To M) 'When God assumes a human body for the sake of His devotees, many of His devotees accompany Him to this earth. ...

'The Divine Mother also showed me in a vision the five suppliers of my needs. ...

'It was revealed to me in a vision that during my last days I should have to live on pudding. During my present illness my wife was one day feeding me with pudding. I burst into tears and said, "Is this my living on pudding near the end, and so painfully?"'<sup>11</sup>

**Saturday, 26 December 1885** • M arrived in the morning and met the Master. Kishori, M's brother, was also a devotee. M told the Master what Kishori had said to him: 'My guru may leave me, but I shall not leave him.' 'Wonderful!' Sri Ramakrishna joyfully remarked.

**Sunday, 27 December 1885** • The Master was feeling much better. He sat up, surrounded by the devotees. Ramchandra strongly believed that the Master's disease was mere pretence and that he could cure himself at any time. One moment he would be suffering from pain and the next he would merge into samadhi. Ram, Nityagopal, and other devotees began to sing kirtan on the ghat of the western pond. As he listened to the kirtan, Sri Ramakrishna went into deep samadhi. Afterwards he said: 'I see my spiritual state is intact; only my disease has suppressed it. ... It is Satchidananda who descends into the human body.'

**Monday, 28 December 1885** • After work M arrived at Kashipur and found Girish, Ram, and others talking with the Ayurvedic doctor of Bagh-bazar. M went upstairs to the Master and bowed down to him. The Master asked him to buy two glass bowls. He reminisced about how, when he was young, he would make clay images of Krishna with his flute as well as other gods and goddesses. The devotees and disciples were singing and dancing downstairs, and with Sri Ramakrishna's permission M joined them.

**Friday, 1 January 1886** • Swami Saradananda described the events of this momentous day, when Sri Ramakrishna became the Kalpataru, the 'wish-fulfilling tree.'

The Master felt better and expressed a desire to walk in the garden for a short while. Because it was a holiday, the householder devotees began arriving at the Cossipore garden after midday individually and in groups. The Master came down from upstairs at 3.00 p.m.; there were more than thirty people talking amongst themselves inside the house and sitting under the trees in the garden. They all stood up reverently and bowed down when they saw him. The Master went out through the western door of the hall, descended onto the garden path, and proceeded slowly southward to the gate. The devotees followed him at a little distance. When he reached the midpoint of the path

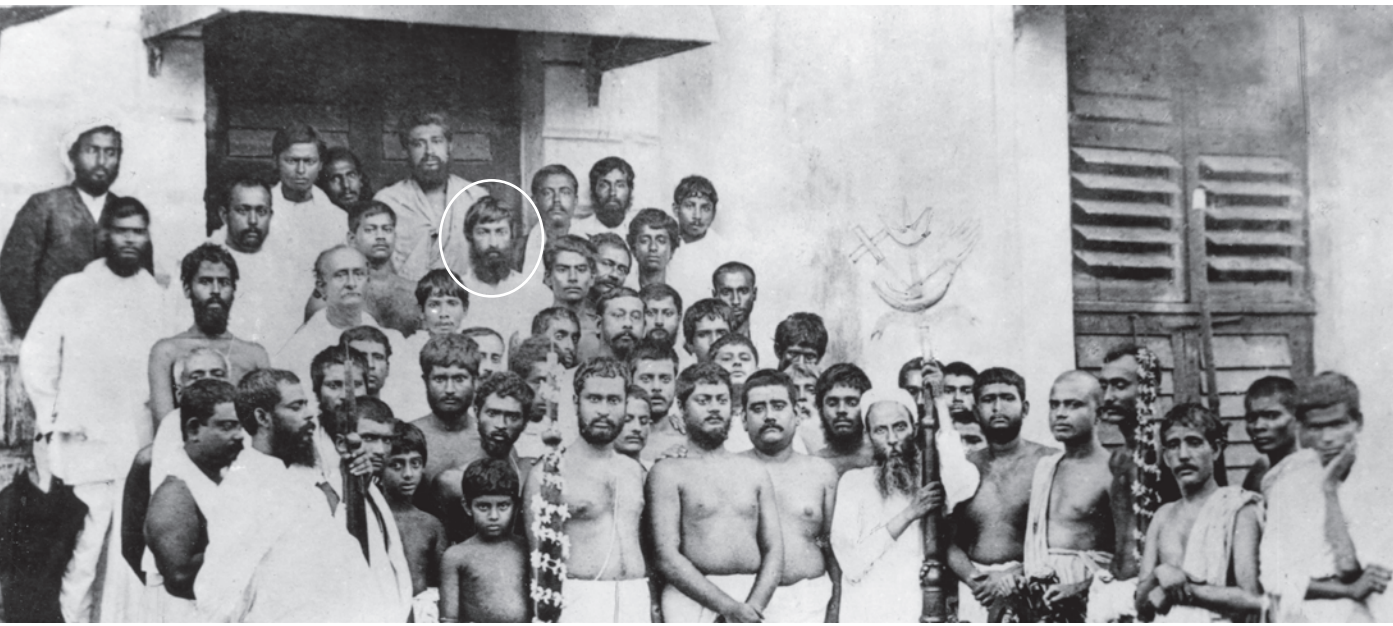
between the house and the gate, the Master saw Girish, Ram, Atul, and a few others under a tree on the west side of the path. They bowed down to him and came to him joyfully.

Before anyone had spoken a word, the Master addressed Girish, asking him: 'Girish, what have you seen and understood (*about me*) that makes you say all these things (*that I am an avatar, and so on*) to everyone, wherever you go?' Unperturbed, Girish knelt down at the Master's feet, folded his hands before his raised face, and responded in a voice choked with emotion: 'What more can I say of Him? Even the sages Vyasa and Valmiki could find no words to measure His glory!' Girish's sincere faith expressed in those words so moved the Master that he said to the devotees, while looking at Girish: 'What more need I tell you? I bless you all. May you all be illumined!' He became overwhelmed by love and compassion for his devotees, and went into ecstasy after uttering those few words.<sup>12</sup>

M was not present that afternoon, but he was at Kashipur in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees: 'Seven years ago, I thought that many people would come here [to himself], and a gatekeeper would have to control the crowd.' At 7.00 p.m. M took his leave and went with Mahima, whose house was nearby. Mahima told M: 'I have never seen another person in India like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.'

**Saturday, 2 January 1886** • The Kalpataru

*Group picture taken at Kashipur a day after Sri Ramakrishna's passing (in the circle Mahendranath Gupta)*



event had taken a toll on the Master's fragile body. M arrived at 1.30 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna asked Navagopal to give some blankets to his attendants and asked M to massage his feet. The Master's sore had been aggravated and he was in pain. He put a small amount of ghee in his mouth, as one of his doctors had said it would lubricate the open sore.

Master: 'I see I have become everything.' M: 'Yes sir. The Lord also said in the Gita (7.7): "Everything is strung on Me as a row of gems on a thread."' M left at 5.00 p.m.

**Sunday, 3 January 1886** • M arrived in the afternoon and found Ram, Devendra, and other devotees in the Master's room. His throat haemorrhaged twice that day.

In the evening Harish brought the Master's meal, but the Master noticed that Harish had smelt the food so he could not eat it. Sri Ramakrishna then chewed a black myrobalan, which is a laxative, but stopped when M reminded him of its effect.

Narendra brought Dr Pratap to see the Master. He examined the wound and gave Sri Ramakrishna some medicine.

**Monday, 4 January 1886** • M arrived at 4.00 p.m. Narendra was in the Master's room. M learned that Narendra had cried for God and begged Sri Ramakrishna to give him samadhi. Shashi told M that the Master had had a lot of bleeding that day. At 9.00 p.m. the Master got up from his bed and talked about Narendra's longing for God. M spent the night there.<sup>13</sup>

**Tuesday, 5 January 1886** • M arrived at 4.00 p.m. and found the Master seated on his bed. He talked about the renunciation of his young disciples and how they were unwilling to enter family life. Then the Master asked M: 'Well, all my joy, all my ecstasy—where are they now?' M replied: 'Perhaps you are now in the state of mind that the Gita describes as beyond the three gunas.' Master: 'Yes, the Divine Mother has put me into the state of a child. Tell me, won't the body live through this illness?' M remained silent (938).

**Wednesday, 6 January 1886** • At 3.30 p.m. M came to Kashipur with his wife and son. He heard

the following story about his student Subodh:

Knowing about the recent aggravation of the Master's throat pain, Subodh simply said: 'Sir, you used to live in a damp room in Dakshineswar. As a result, it seems you have a sore throat because of the cold. Please take tea. Whenever we have sore throats, we drink tea and the soreness goes away. If you want, I can bring some good tea from my home.' Immediately the childlike Master called Rakhal and said: 'Look, I want to drink tea. This boy says that I will be cured if I drink tea.' Rakhal said: 'Sir, tea is very hot; it may aggravate your throat. You may not be able to bear it.' 'No, then it is not necessary,' said the Master. He consoled Subodh, 'Hot tea will not suit me.' Subodh was moved by the Master's childlike nature.<sup>14</sup>

**Thursday, 7 January 1886** • Although M had a full-time job as headmaster of Vidyasagar's school in Calcutta, almost every day he visited the Master in Kashipur—which is quite a distance from Calcutta. M arrived at 4.30 p.m. The Master was teaching Narendra how to practise sadhana. Narendra asked M: 'Well, you practised sadhana under the bel tree in Dakshineswar for a month. Could you tell me what you achieved?' M replied with a smile: 'I achieved him [pointing to the Master].' The Master laughed.

**Friday, 8 January 1886** • M arrived in the afternoon. Observing Narendra's longing for God, the Master asked him to sing a few songs praising Krishna. Narendra sang three songs. It was the Master's suppertime, but his meal had not arrived. The Master sent M downstairs to enquire about it. When the food was brought, Sri Ramakrishna ate a small amount of farina pudding. After supper the Master asked M to massage his feet. When he finished, M covered Sri Ramakrishna with a quilt and left.

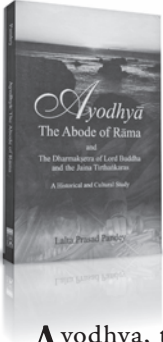
(To be continued)

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11. *Gospel*, 932–4.
12. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 926.
13. *Gospel*, 935–7.
14. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 539.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



***Ayodhyā: The Abode of Rāma  
and the Dharmakṣetra  
of Lord Buddha and  
the Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras***

Lalta Prasad Pandey

Munshiram Manoharlal, PO Box 5715,  
54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055.  
2009. Website: [www.mrmlbooks.com](http://www.mrmlbooks.com).  
xxx + 138 pp. Rs 350.

Ayodhya, the impregnable; an icon of dharma guarded by heroic kings and idealist princes. A city of renunciation for creating a life divine for humankind; of desecrations in the name of religion; of the common man's heroism as well as his moral turpitude. Ayodhya, a big question mark today.

L P Pandey brings a lifetime's historical scholarship, marked by deep erudition, to examine the area and its resonant tangled history. Studying Indian history is quite different from historical investigations elsewhere in the world. In India mythology mingles with history, historical figures are worshipped even today as divine beings, and it is perilous to take a one-sided view of it all. Pandey rightly criticizes the Procrustean analysis of Indian Marxist historians who reject age-old traditions, base themselves only on truncated socio-economic processes, and generally caw about secularist talk without any understanding of what secularism really means.

'Demolition of the age-old traditions, therefore, can hardly help a historian to reconstruct. A rich cultural heritage is an asset to a country. That is its real wealth which is traced by making a study of its values which are known from various symbols, motifs, myths, art-forms, and traditions. Meanings of life and society are to be traced. This is the real subject-matter of a historian's research' (xiv).

With this healthy and holistic view Pandey proceeds to trace Ayodhya's presence in the Vedas through the Ikshvaku dynasty which ruled over it. Enough has been brought out as archaeological material to trace Ayodhya's history from the sixth century onwards, but then 'without having the entire city

of Ayodhyā dug on a large scale, its antiquity and full period of life can never be known' (6). The author scours Jain and Buddhist literatures apart from the writings of the Vedic lineage to tell us the history of a new settlement, Saketa, in ancient times. It was a highly developed society in every way. Indo-Greek invasions during the second century BCE led to a complete breakdown of civil administration as Saketa was heartlessly plundered. Most of the citizenry migrated and Saketa was identified with Ayodhya henceforth.

In the course of centuries Buddhism and Jainism waxed strong, but Vaishnavism also took a great leap forward. Ashvamedha and other sacrifices were performed with éclat. The Ramayana yields a good picture of these centuries. The third phase of Ayodhya belongs to the age of the Guptas. From Kalidasa's descriptions we know that it was a highly developed land. The texts of all the three religions, epigraphs, and coins help Pandey give a cogent history of Ayodhya.

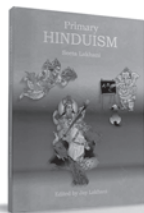
An important revelatory text for post-Gupta times comes from the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang. Places of worship for all religions abound in Ayodhya, which was considered 'the holiest of the holy places of Hindus in whole of India' by the early medieval period. It was also a flourishing city as detailed by the Jain work *Tilakamanjari*. So invincible was the city that even the infamous Mahmud of Ghazni did not come near it, and the Ayodhya-based King Chandradeva seems to have repulsed the second invasion of Ghazni's scourge. We learn that the Treta-ka-Thakura temple, built by the last Gahadavala emperor Jayachandra, is probably now known as the Rama-janma-sthana temple.

The concluding chapter surveys again the land traversed so far by researchers—literature, records, pottery, Copper-Hoards artefacts, including weapons—to limn the history of Ayodhya: a fascinating tale. But Pandey also places before us the unseemly controversy created by a section of historians bent upon demolishing the past. The little archaeology that has been done belongs to the Saketa portion of Ayodhya and not to its original core area. It is then not surprising that the archaeologists

have not found traces of old structures at Ayodhya. At this point of time it seems perfectly reasonable to think of the entire area of Ayodhya as the Rama-janma-sthana.

A rich set of appendices—including one on the antiquity of Bharadwaja Ashrama in Allahabad—detailed notes, a plentiful bibliography, and an index make *Ayodhyā: The Abode of Rāma* a very important publication by a balanced historian of our times.

Dr Prema Nandakumar  
Researcher and Literary Critic  
Srirangam



### Primary Hinduism

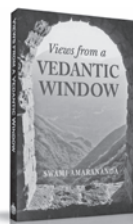
Seeta Lakhani; ed. Jay Lakhani

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. Website: [www.chennaiamath.org](http://www.chennaiamath.org). 2009. vi + 116 pp. Rs 225.

**A**mbitiously setting out to cater for all children ranging from five to fourteen years old—key stages one to three—this book must necessarily pack a lot of information into its modest 116 pages. Not only does it achieve this difficult task without embroiling readers in a confused jumble, it does so with astounding grace and artistry. The large pages are brought to life with wonderfully colourful illustrations and the general layout is both attractive and easy on the eye. Over ten chapters the rudimentary foundations of Hinduism are presented in an appealing and lucid manner, each chapter concluding with a simple summary, a number of points to stimulate discussion, and suggested classroom activities. Younger pupils will enjoy the illuminating stories and vivid pictures whilst elder students will be urged to tackle such weighty topics as religious pluralism, third-world debt, and the role of science in spiritual life. Supporting the contents of the book are educational extras offered on the affiliated Hinduism for Schools website, which supplies additional resources for all age groups.

A pivotal theme flowing in a gentle undercurrent through the pages is one of religious harmony coupled with universal consideration, and the message is so sensitively conveyed that children will be left morally and ethically elevated, without realizing they have been on the receiving end of that much-loathed thing called advice. *Primary Hinduism* is a positive contribution to religious education and is bound to be well received by teachers, parents, and children alike.

Br Mark  
Somerset



### Views from a Vedantic Window

Swami Amarananda

Centre Vedantique, 63 Av d'Aire 1203  
Geneva. 2009. Website: [www.centre-vedantique.org](http://www.centre-vedantique.org). xviii + 157 pp. Rs 50.

**T**he mild Hindu, 'the dreamy Hindu', 'the philosophical Hindu', and other similar phrases are passé. However, the words Hindu and Hinduism bring out sharp reactions even today. This is true among Hindus and non-Hindus in India as well as abroad. The reactions are both positive and negative, depending on the level of acquaintance with the ancient and still thriving religion of India.

Hinduism has grown over the millennia and the staggering diversity has become confusing to many Hindus themselves, not to speak of those belonging to other religions. This book, written by a learned monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, is a kind of rebuttal of some wrong conceptions with regard to certain aspects of Hinduism, while at the same time clarifies and presents a modern perspective on those aspects.

The contents of the book are particularly helpful for Western people and occidentalized Hindus who have been adrift from their original moorings. Swami Amarananda had represented the Ramakrishna Order in the third and fourth World's Parliament of Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, and Barcelona, Spain, respectively. The two papers the swami presented on those occasions form the core of the book. Other papers and articles form the fringe. The author, in his two decades of living in Geneva, learned well what issues in Hinduism confuses non-Hindus and hence has discussed, for instance: polytheism, idolatry, cow worship, caste, reincarnation, marriages, and so on. Being a compilation of different papers at world forums, some information overlaps. A little more diligence could have eliminated the few typos.

PB



### Indian Saints and Mystics

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. Website: [www.sriramakrishna.org](http://www.sriramakrishna.org). 2009. 296 pp. Rs 125.

**A**n important landmark in the cultural history of medieval India was the silent revolution in so-

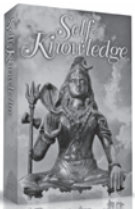
ciety brought about by a host of socioreligious reforms, particularly the bhakti movement. The chief characteristic of the bhakti movement was believing in one God as well as worshipping him with love and devotion irrespective of one's caste and creed. This is the central theme of the life stories of saints presented in this book. The bhakti movement spread slowly across North India because of the efforts of notable saints like Namadeva, Tukarama, and Ramananda.

This book contains twenty-seven biographical sketches of saints and mystics of the bhakti movement, largely from Maharashtra. Originally published between 2001 and 2006 in the *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*, these well-researched articles have now been presented in a compendium.

Every life in the book is unique. Each of them portrays various facets of the personality and teachings of these saints. Many facts hitherto unknown to common readers make for interesting read. The incidents in the life of Namadeva—like offering of ghee to a dog—are inspiring and establish the unity of consciousness in all beings. These lives seem to echo the ethos of Indian scriptures. India's spiritual tradition has been kept alive for centuries by these saints. They believed that God could be seen and renounced everything to attain God-realization, the sole pursuit of their lives. Due to their faith and devotion, God revealed to them and often acted as their saviour. God was enslaved by the love and devotion of these saints.

The poetic outpourings of the devotion of these saints have been gracefully translated in verse. The lives of less-known saints like Kurmadasa enrich this volume, which could help researchers working on Indian saints and strengthen the devotional fervour of spiritual aspirants.

Sukanya Sinha  
New Delhi



### **Self Knowledge** Nome

Atma Jnana Publications, PO Box 597,  
Soquel, California 95073. 2003. xvi +  
481 pp.

Ramana Maharshi laid stress on Self-inquiry leading to the knowledge of the Self. A teacher of Ramana Maharshi's philosophy and of Advaita Vedanta, Nome—also known as Jeffrey Smith—has put in simple English truths inaccessible to many because

of a lack of familiarity with Sanskrit. The first glance at the book may make one exclaim: 'Oh! A tome from Nome!' But careful study establishes its value as a reference work for the followers of the path of Self-inquiry propounded by Advaita Vedanta and Ramana Maharshi.

Divided into four parts, this volume contains aphoristic verses, transcripts of lectures, and answers to questions bringing out various aspects of Advaita Vedanta. English equivalents of the Sanskrit sutras, the verses explicate various traditional ideas like 'a rabbit with horns' (64) or 'a fruit in the hand' (68). One is reminded of a parable of Sri Ramakrishna by the following lines: 'Practice, practice, practice intensely/Like a man drowning/Reaching for air' (32).

The book elucidates various fundamental tenets of Advaita Vedanta and keeps one constantly reminded of the true nature of one's Self. The nature of the Self, of guru and grace, and concepts like self-annihilation are discussed in detail. The witty and lucid style of answering persistent questions encourages perseverant striving for knowledge. Truly, 'the answer comes when the mind turns from duality to nonduality' (432). For anyone interested in attaining Self-knowledge, this could be a good guidebook.

Swami Narasimhananda  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



### **Social Philosophy of** **Swami Vivekananda**

Amulya Ranjan Mohapatra

Readworthy Publications, A-18, Mohan  
Garden, New Delhi 110 059. Web-  
site: [www.readworthypub.com](http://www.readworthypub.com). 2009.  
x + 110 pp. Rs 140.

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of service to humankind had the realization of their innate divinity as its basis. His ideas of 'root and branch reform' were born out of a holistic world view. This handy book highlights the socialist perspective of the swami's thought. It establishes him as a social reformer and activist who knew education to be the panacea of all ills. Through a beautiful collation of Swami Vivekananda's utterances, the author points out that the swami's philosophy of humanism upholds the ideals of renunciation and service. To the swami, serving humanity was serving God. For anyone interested in serving fellow human beings, this book would offer help.

Swami Narasimhananda

# REPORTS

## News from Branch Centres

Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed Sri Ramakrishna block of the Vivekananda College at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai**, on 8 August 2010.

From 8 to 10 September the Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence at **Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad**, celebrated its 10th anniversary in the presence of Sri E S L Narasimhan, governor of Andhra Pradesh, Swami Prabhananda, and several other dignitaries.

During the month of September **Ramakrishna Mission, Kadapa**, celebrated the centenary of the Ramakrishna movement in Kadapa by conducting various programmes, including the inauguration of a newly built multipurpose hall and the renovated shrine, both at its city centre.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur**, held a symposium on universal brotherhood that was inaugurated by Dr Raman Singh, chief minister of Chhattisgarh, on 11 September.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built first floor of the technical section building of the girls' school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha**, on 18 September.

The annual convocation of the **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, for its faculties of Disability Management and Special Education (DMSE) and General and Adapted Physical Education and Yoga (GAPEdy) was held at the university's faculty centre in Coimbatore on 25 September. For the above faculties, 95 and 313 successful candidates respectively were awarded degree and diploma certificates. Dr Mylswamy Annadurai, Project



*Relief activities at Narainpur*

Director, Chandrayaan-1 & 2, ISRO Satellite Centre, Bengaluru, delivered the convocation address.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly built first floor of the primary school building at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi**, on 28 September.

## Relief

**Flood Relief** • During the month of September devastating rains and flash floods left a trail of death, suffering, and massive destruction in Chhattisgarh, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. Three centres close to the affected areas immediately started relief operations. **Narainpur** centre served to the victims cooked food (poha and khichuri) and distributed 251 mats, 250 chadars, 250 blankets, 125 sets of ladies garments (each set containing 1 sari, 1 petticoat, and other items), 125 shirts, 125 pants, and 125 sets of utensils (each set containing 4 aluminium pots, 1 steel bucket, 1 steel drum, 1 steel plate, 2 steel glasses, 2 steel bowls, 1 ladle, 1 rice spoon, 1 khunti, and 1 karai) to 125 affected families of 8 villages in Narainpur district. **Chandigarh** centre provided medical relief to 200 flood-affected patients of the Panipat district. **Kanpur** centre distributed 3,980 kg rice, 1,592 kg pulses, 1,592 kg sugar, 318 kg rusk, 199 kg cake, 796 plastic buckets, and 796 sets of steel utensils (each set containing 2 glasses, 3 cooking vessels, and 2 plates) to 796 families of 7 villages in Kanpur district. Further reports are awaited.

**Flood Rehabilitation** • **Belgaum** centre continued the construction of 213 houses for the victims of the October 2009 flood at Gokak and Sindhanur taluks in Belgaum and Raichur districts respectively. Till September the centre had erected 88 houses up to the plinth level, 17 to the lintel level, and 91 to the roof level.

PB

# BHAGAVAD GITA

## THE DIVINE MESSAGE

Swami Abhedananda

The sixty-five memorable lectures on the Bhagavad Gita delivered by Swami Abhedananda in America before scholarly audiences form the contents of this work in two volumes. Swami Prajnanananda has critically edited and annotated these lectures, with portions of commentaries of Shankaracharya and Madhusudana Sarasvati and glossaries of Anandagiri and Sridhara Swami, wherever necessary. He has also written the valuable preface. Also, the Sanskrit texts of chapters I & II of the Gita together with their English translations by Swami Abhedananda have been appended.

These lectures are new and scientific expositions of the **BHAGAVAD GITA** carrying an original and scholastic stamp of their own. The book is of Medium Octavo size and printed in good quality paper, and is unique in its field having the following two parts :

***PART-I** With 521 pages containing 32 lectures in 32 chapters with an appendix, and*

***PART-II** with 490 pages containing 33 lectures.*

This second edition of the book containing a tri-colour picture of Sri Krishna and Arjuna by Late Nandalal Bose is available with cloth binding with beautiful jacket **at a nominal price of Rs. 300/- only per set of two parts. Forwarding charges extra.**

## RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA MATH

### PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT

19A & B, Raja Rajkrishna Street, Kolkata-700 006, India.

☎ (91-033) 2555-7300 & 2555-8292

E-mail : ramakrishnavedantamath@vsnl.net

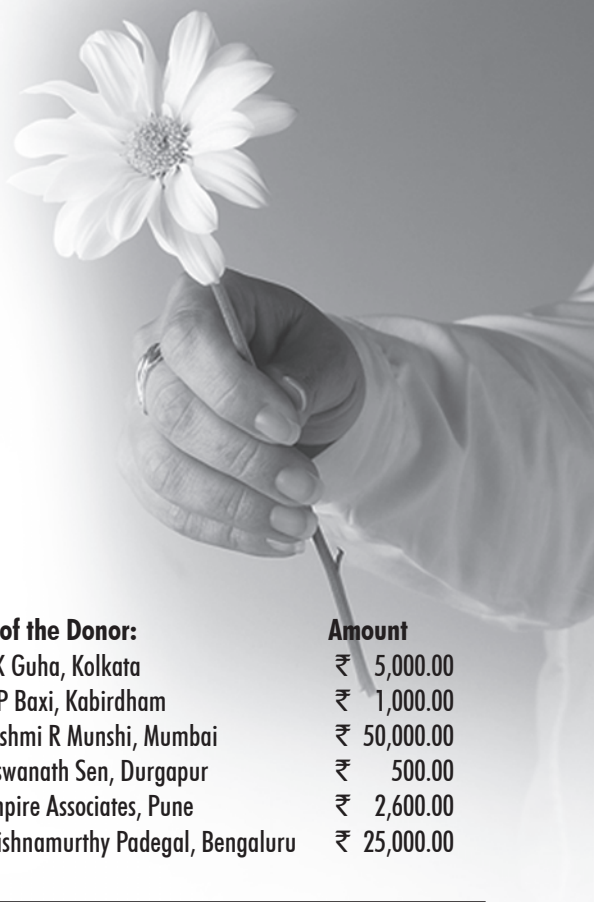
Website : www.ramakrishnavedantamath.org



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